



THE NORTHERNER



NORAH DAVIS

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Ella Beckett
1902

THE NORTHERNER



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By
NORAH DAVIS

"Yea, though we sinned — and our rulers went from righteousness —
Deep in all dishonor though we stained our garments' hem :
Oh, be ye not dismayed,
Though we stumbled and we strayed,
We were led by evil counselors — the Lord shall deal with them."

"The Seven Seas." Kipling.



NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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THE CENTURY CO.

Published October, 1905

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1905

**DEDICATED WITH CORDIAL REGARD
TO MY BROTHER - IN - LAW
JUDGE DAVID D. SHELBY**

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I

AN AMERICAN GENTLEMAN

“WHAT is this you are letting me in for to-night, Hallett? Had you not better give me points? I don’t know that I am altogether up in the form required by an entertainment given to the ‘noble dead,’ ” said Falls, as he and Hallett were making their leisurely way out to Hillcrest. They had left the town and were climbing the steep, rocky street leading to Judge Adair’s house upon the foot-hills just outside of town.

In front of them, across the dip of the valley, lay the long, low ranges of the Cumberland Mountains, fold upon fold, as though the horizon were rucked at its edges; at their right, and between them and the open fields, was a hedge of Cherokee roses — a wall of glistening foliage starred with flat, white velvet blossoms set thickly with sharp thorns; and about them glowed the subdued brilliance of the newly fallen night.

Both men wore immaculate evening dress, Falls wearing his with the unconsciousness of the man to whom

perfect and correct dress is the result of long habit of precision in such matters, while Hallett's elaborate grooming betrayed something of the effort which it undoubtedly had cost him. He was adjusting a rose, from the hedge at his side, in his buttonhole; and he finished its arrangement, critically viewing the effect against his black coat, before he answered Falls.

"It is hard to say just what it is, exactly; so much is in the point of view. To you, for instance, it is an opportunity, and a capital one, of meeting in a social way all the best people in Adairville; that is really why I asked Miss Adair for the invitation. To me, it is an insufferable bore. In its more serious aspect—the way in which the people who are doing it, you know, take it—it is a sacred tribute to the heroes of what they call 'The Lost Cause,' meaning the under dog in the 'late unpleasantness'! To the spectators—there will be quite a few, Hillcrest is a charming house, and there is some talk of a dance after the business of the evening—"

"Dance!" echoed Falls, a trifle scandalized, "is that also a part of the sacred tribute?"

"The dance will come on later, after the tribute has been disposed of. Oh, yes; well, to be explicit, The Daughters of the Confederacy, the local chapter, are to present what they call 'The Southern Cross of Honor,'" —he broke off with a short laugh, "it has '*Deo Vindice*' on its reverse!—to the veterans of the Reb—George! What a slip! I'm glad no one was by! I mean, the Confederate army. . . . And you 'll hear Watson speak."

"What else will there be besides old soldiers and old women?" pursued Falls, unappeased by the social feast which Hallett was spreading for his delectation.

"Moonlight—" Hallett took a long, silent pull at his cigar, "and roses, and — Betty Archer!"

"Is that all?"

"All? For heaven's sake, man, what more do you want? June in Dixie—moonlight and — Betty Archer! Do you waltz, Falls?"

"No; that is, I hardly know; it has been a good many years since I had time to waltz."

They smoked, for a space, in silence, which Hallett broke abruptly:

"This is hardly the time for business, but—" he paused, tentatively, his glance rather keenly fixed upon his companion.

Falls's eyes were fixed upon the dark bulwark of the mountain rising against the star-spangled scroll of the sky, in a long abstracted gaze full of keen speculation, as he paused upon his answer.

"Yes," he said at last, quietly, "it goes."

After an instant, in which he strove successfully to cover his keen triumph at the consummation of the deal, Hallett turned to his companion with an interest frankly stimulated by his decision. They had paused beside an opening in the hedge, and Hallett ran his eye over Falls's handsome figure, leaning upon the rail beside him in a poise of easy strength, with a glance which mentally appraised him.

"Soldier of Fortune," he had summed Falls up, when he had met him a week before at the station in Adairville, "plus brains and — devil! Well, he 'll need 'em both before he 's done with the Power and Passenger Company and its — er — complications!"

His first impression of the man had been of his force-

fulness, and after a week of intercourse he found the initial impression unmodified. Falls was the typical American man of affairs. Tall, broad of shoulder, and thin of flank and in the full flush of superb maturity, he had the long-limbed ease of motion and the absolute stillness in repose which only the possession of muscles like great smooth bands of elastic steel could give to a man of his height and build. He leaned upon the rail, his hat in his hand, his steady eyes upon the undulating line of the mountain, unconscious of the other man's glance, which weighed him against a situation undreamed of, as yet, in Falls's philosophy.

The lucid moonlight showed to Hallett his profile from the parting, exactly above his brow, in his thick dark hair, to his clean-shaven unsmiling mouth, which, with the chin below it, seemed cast in a mould of inflexible decision. The bold sweep of his brows, bent sharply in at their juncture, lent an expression of gloom to eyes which in themselves established Falls's only claim to beauty. For the rest, every line and contour in the harsh, authoritative face expressed an assured, almost an arrogant, confidence in its owner's will to dare and power to do.

During the week just past, it had afforded Hallett keen, though discreetly suppressed amusement, to note the effect of the man's personality upon the town.

Under a gold vulture's wings on the peak of a Viking's helmet, his hand hard on the tiller, with the boat scudding along in an angry sea, the north wind in his nostrils and the black billows under his feet, Falls would have been magnificent, and quite in character. But against Adairville as a background, clad in a suit of Merwin tweeds, in the first hot days in June, it cannot be denied that

Falls had seemed a bit strenuous, or that Adairville had found him so!

Hallett smiled mentally now, as a fragment of a street scene witnessed the day before floated through his mind. In some inexplicable way 'Dairville had accepted Falls personally! His energy, his tweeds, his accent seemed, collectively and severally, a personal affront; his strenuousness got on the nerves of the loungers upon the flags in front of the Adair Hotel — the one spot in the whole town where aristocracy of caste was merged into democracy of opinion — and as he passed among their serried ranks, eyes from beneath tipped-down hat-brims and behind the flaccid sheets of local dailies followed him in silent challenge.

"Who's he?" asked Berkley Kane, as he joined a group, extending his hand impartially to the first man he encountered, who promptly placed therein a plug of tobacco.

"'Lectric light man."

"Not another one er them same—"

"Naw; this here's er a new deal. Falls — that's him — he's the whole push, so they tell me. He's It!"

Falls had added nothing to his almost monosyllabic reply, frankly leaving the amenities of the occasion, if there were to be any, to the other man. Hallett promptly assumed them; and gliding easily from a business to a social basis, proffered suave congratulations and genial assurances.

"Personally, you know, Falls, and, er — for the town as well." Falls met his civic courtesies with a flat indifference which had the rather disconcerting effect of

making them seem mere meretriciousness. His austere personality had often this disconcerting effect upon men — more often men than women; women found the frank indifference, which was to men a flat rebuff, piquant — and always to Falls's grave surprise.

"I am heartily glad of your decision, Mr. Falls," Hallett persisted, refusing to be rebuffed by his companion's lack of responsiveness. "We will be glad to have you settle here permanently; I know the sentiment of the town toward Northern immigration. The truth is, we need men of precisely your sort. Need them badly. The town is somewhat overstocked with Northern capital," he paused to annotate this statement with a smile of sunny significance, "but what the town does need is the men themselves. Northern push and vigor are the very things to carry through all sorts of local enterprises."

"Who takes care of their own enterprises, while they are pushing local affairs?" asked Falls carelessly.

Hallett turned a casual glance upon him as he answered:

"Oh, it is all one; you push your own interests by pushing the town's."

"I never engage in coöperative financing," said Falls; "I seek, frankly, my own interest in coming here. Adairville may go to the devil for all I care!"

Hallett laughed his musical, unamused laugh, without further comment; but he had forever settled in his own mind the question of Falls's adequacy to deal with the "situation."

"Aye," he said to himself as they strode on, "they'll crucify his pride and break his heart — if he has brought it here with him, and I think he has — and absorb his capital, and refer him to the devil for his damages.

That 's Dixie all over; but — it 's the best country on God's green earth for all that; and I wouldn't go back to Massachusetts if they 'd make me governor."

"This is the house," he said a moment later as they came abreast of a mass of dark shrubbery, overtopped by waving branches, black against the sky, "Judge Adair's house, Hillcrest; this is the side entrance, the low gate, they call it; the house fronts the hill above us."

Falls paused in frank admiration of the stately old house which crowned the rounded hilltop above the street where they stood. It was a wide Colonial house, built of the creamy-buff sandstone found in the Cumberland Mountains, and seen, as Falls saw it now for the first time, bathed from cornice to door-stone in a flood of moonlight, it seemed fashioned of alabaster. It was surrounded by a mantle of verdure which trailed downward to the very street below.

Wide colonnades, whose heavy cornices were supported upon groups of pillars, surrounded it on three sides; on the fourth, the side which faced the two young men in the street below, the hill fell sharply away in a succession of terraces. Through the dusk as they looked upward, flight after flight of broken marble stairs gleamed pallidly, leading upward seven, eight, nine, ten terraces to the rose-hung gallery above.

"'Befo' de wah,'" said Hallett, dryly, as Falls whistled softly, counting the terraces, "this girl's great-grandfather, old Admiral Adair — old buccaneer! — built this house and dug those terraces with his own slaves; he owned no end of them on plantations in the Mississippi-Yazoo Delta, and he brought them here in droves and worked them — "

"To good purpose, I must say!" cried Falls. "Your new South, Hallett, is a beggar maid indeed, beside Dixie!"

Hallett made no answer, but opened a little gate set in the privet hedge, and together they made their way up two of the lower terraces to where they had a clear view of the airy gallery above, hung with a tapestry of roses. Under the dense shade of the trees the air was damp and almost cold, and saturated with the pungent perfume of honeysuckle, which hung in great, pendent masses from every wall and trellis.

Hallett, groping his way in advance, paused suddenly, and, turning back, laid his hand upon Falls's arm and pointed silently upward to the terraces just above them, upon the farther end of which a high-arched arbor rose against the moonlit spaces of the sky. A cascade of bloom flowed over it, draping its openings with curtains of pale purple wistaria. In the arch of the farther opening a woman's delicate figure seemed poised upon air. Her floating draperies melted into the gloom about her feet, but her graceful head and shoulders were as clearly cut as a cameo against the pale amethyst sky behind her. A man's form emerged from the darkness at her feet, half-kneeling, half-sitting, upon the step below her, with one arm about her, his massive head thrown back against her in seemingly impassioned appeal.

As they gazed in silence, the picture, set in its frame of living bud and blossom, changed; the man rose, and Falls heard a smothered exclamation at his side.

"Watson, by all that's great!"

They saw him lift the girl's hanging hands and knew that he kissed their palms; he raised them to his neck,

the two forms blotted into one, the man's head bent downward to the head upon his breast. "Come, Hallett," said Falls roughly, "let 's get out of this! This is actionable — why, it 's indecent, spying upon a man like this! Who was the woman?" he asked, as they made their way to the entrance above.

"Betty Archer — and the man was Watson."

Falls passed his hand over his eyes, pushing back the short hair from his brow where beads of sweat were clinging. "It was like a scene from an opera; exquisitely set, exquisitely rendered! I cannot get away from it; it clings like a perfume!"

"I don't want to get shut of it," declared Hallett with energetic decision; Hallett occasionally allowed himself one of his boyhood's colloquialisms in moments of excitement. "I would not take five hundred dollars for having seen it!"

"You set a high value upon a bit of experience which in honor can never be mentioned!" said Falls.

"It 's something, even to have seen another man kiss as pretty a woman as Betty Archer! I shall enjoy it — er — vicariously, you know, in the lonely watches of the night! I used to be decidedly gone on the lovely Betty myself, when I first came to Alabama; but there 's metal more attractive — "

He gave Falls a side glance from under his drooped lid, but Falls was busied in self-congratulation that none of his own private experiences graced the walls of Mr. Hallett's mental picture-gallery, and did not perceive the covert look.

When the two young men reached the entrance to Hillcrest, the impetuous Southern night had fallen some time

before. The sward of the great, fan-shaped lawns was frosted with moonlight, and patched with black velvet shadows of elms and cedars scattered about its level expanse.

The air was filled with a steady hum of talk, punctuated by ecstatic shrieks of women's laughter rising above the deeper resonance of masculine voices.

"Did you say something about dropping a tear, Hal-l ett, on this solemn occasion?" inquired Falls, with a grin, as they skirted the lawn on their way to the house. "Are you sure it will be in order?"

"The tears will be in order when Watson speaks — the women always cry when he speaks. This is between the acts!"

The house was not lighted from within, the moon high in the dark blue field of the sky bravely doing link-boy duty for the whole affair, which was distinctly al fresco in character. Chairs were scattered about the pavements of the colonnades for the older people, those to whom dew-wet grass and dew-chilled air had lost their charm twenty years before; many of the chairs were already occupied, and on the steps to the colonnades, which were one soft dazzle of moonlight, groups of friends and kinsfolk lingered in laughing talk, parted, and reunited for one more word of soft-voiced, drawling jesting, touched now and then with a quiet note of sadness in a half-spoken, half-withdrawn word of remembrance when the speaker was a woman, or of stern bitterness from the lips of a man.

Bareheaded women walked about the lawns, holding their white skirts gathered high in one hand, like great white carnations. The air was filled with calls, greetings, scraps

of war talk; the words "Dixie" and "th' Confederacy" fell constantly from lips which spoke them as carelessly as they said "Alabama" and "Holmes County."

Here and there men in rough jeans and limp cotton shirts, their hats held awkwardly in their hands, stood about, with keen eyes alert for some old commander, some well-loved "Captain" or "Colonel" whose set face they had last seen, perhaps, as they had followed him through the smoke of battle for the sake of what they now reverently called "th' Lost Cause."

"Why, howdy, Cur'nel — ya'as, fum Sa-a-nd Mountain . . . crapping yit!" . . . "Are the veterans all coming? Will they wear their uniforms? — Oh, *so* much more romantic, you know!" . . . "Romantic! Gawd A'mighty! Well, it may seem romantic *now!*" . . . "Who's going to pin on the Crosses?" . . . "Oh, Betty Archer! Why Betty?" . . . "Why, Clem Archer, you know! He and his son — Betty's father, Ben Archer — went to the wah together. Ben was only sixteen years old; he and his father fought side by side — the boy buried him, there on the battle-field, after the Seven Days' fight —" "I he'ped him do it!" said a grave voice from the shadows, where a tall mountaineer stood shyly lost in the shadow of a cedar, "an' I ain't never seed 'im fum that day to this'n! . . . You doan't say? I'd sho' love to see 'im!"

"Ain't that Gen'rul Armstrong er standin' over there er talkin' to that lady? Ain't he th' one as was goin' t' drink all th' blood shed in th' wah?"

"Ya'as, I b'lieve so, but 's fur 's ever *I* seen, he ain't never drank nothen' but old Bourbon! He's ben 'lected to Cawngress over 'n' over on his wah record, so I s'pose he must er got one somewhere else than on th' field!"

I ain't never know'd of him doin' no fightin' 'cep'en on the stump!"

Chains and garlands of half-grown girls flashed and darted among the older people, with a winnowing of short skirts and a soft thudding of heel-less shoes.

As Hallett and his companion paused at the foot of the steps to give way before a bevy of girls, in full flight before some unseen pursuer, they came full upon Watson, who it then transpired was the one in pursuit.

He abandoned his prey with a laughing challenge to a future engagement, and turned at once to Falls, with a word of apology to Hallett over his shoulder.

"Excuse me, Hallett; I 've a fancy for making Mr. Falls's acquaintance unassisted."

He offered his hand to Falls as he spoke with a cordial smile which vivified his stolid face into a winning sweetness unexpected and delightful. He held Falls's hand in a strong unyielding grasp as he spoke again to Hallett over his shoulder. "Here is Joan!" But Hallett, with a controlled eagerness not lost upon Falls, had gone forward to meet the girl advancing toward them.

Falls's eyes were caught by her buoyant grace as she crossed the gallery, walking with a step longer and freer than is usual with a Southern-born woman; he noted, too, the admirable lack of consciousness with which her level glance met his, frankly including him in her greeting, as she bowed with a serene composure that she wore as it were a graceful mantle, draping, but not concealing, the girlish spontaneity beneath.

His careless glance detected none of the languid grace, the subtle charm, with which poetic fancy has clothed the daughters of Dixie. The west wind flattening fields of

daffodils under an April sky is not more crisply, buoyantly alive than was the girl upon whom his eyes were resting. The poise of her elastic figure, the resilience of her motion, the clear radiance of her eyes, the smile of her soft flexuous mouth whose contours had still the indefiniteness of childhood, spoke an exquisite zest of life which woke an answering thrill in Falls.

When she spoke in answer to Hallett's greeting there was, to Falls, a piquant unexpectedness, a quaint and charming inconsistency, it seemed to him in those first moments, between the studied finish of her appearance and manner, and her voice. In every line of her gracious figure, the poise of her head upon the straight throat, her tip-tilted chin curved like the petal of a Nephotos rose, he read consciousness of race, breeding; but, in place of the insolent droop of an eyelid, and a disdainful lip, which would have seemed in character, her gray eyes met his own squarely, full of a warm, impersonal friendliness.

"It is sheer, sheer recklessness in you to be here at all," she was saying to Hallett in the soft drawl to which Falls's ear had grown accustomed in the past week, and in the most delightful voice that he had ever heard, "and if Mrs. Eldridge-Jones —"

"I had rather counted upon your protection here tonight, Miss Adair, for Falls and me — two helpless strangers within your gates!" said Hallett, with a critical eye on Falls as he made his bow.

"Oh, stay — stay by all manner of means! If Mrs. Eldridge-Jones does not want you she will be delighted to tell you so!" She turned to leave them. "Mr. Falls —" Falls bent his head eagerly — "don't let Mr.

Hallett impose upon you about your accent! You can safely talk New England, if you like, just so you refrain from incendiary references to the 'late Rebellion!'"

The evening was half-spent when Joan, going lightly about her duties as hostess, encountered Falls, who was strolling in bored abstraction about the grounds.

"Mr. Hallett charged me," she said, pausing in the moonlight, "to introduce you —"

"Of course he did!" answered Falls, with smiling exasperation. "I have never known any one so deeply imbued with the national vice of introducing people as Hallett! Platform oratory has lost a star in Hallett!"

The girl laughed lightly. She was about to step upon the lawn where each close set spear of grass was beaded with a drop of dew like hoarfrost. Falls gently restrained her.

"Your shoe would be soaking wet in a moment. Let us keep to the gravel — to this gravel, and see where this subterranean passage will lead us; into what unknown lands where men do wear their heads beneath their shoulders —"

"Ah, but I have sailed these seas before! I know exactly where we should come out — at the steps to the terraced garden. I am sorry to disappoint you."

They had been strolling slowly along the dim path which showed a white streak under the gloria-mundi hedges, their steps falling noiselessly upon the sand, and as Joan was speaking they emerged in the open space at the head of the steps leading downward to the dew-drenched tangle of the lower lawns. The tree-tops swayed sleepily in the crooning wind, a wave of freshness laden

with the heady odor of the white-star jasmine rose from the cool depths, all around them the ceaseless antiphonal of the katydids beat the air in a brazen symphony.

Falls turned to the stairs, and, standing below Joan on the steps, held up his hand to aid her in their descent.

"Oh," she said a little hurriedly, "not to-night, I think, Mr. Falls; some other time I will show you the rose garden, with pleasure."

"The rose garden!" echoed Falls, a superb disdain in his voice. "I do not care a fig for the rose garden! It is the wistaria arbor upon which I have set my heart. I had just a glimpse of it as we came up to-night. Those masses of pale purple bloom must be divine with the moonlight upon them."

He stood below her, bareheaded, awaiting calmly the moment when she should see fit to accept his uplifted hand and descend.

"The wistaria arbor! Ri-d-i-culous! Prep-o-sterous! . . . Ab-s-u-rd!" Joan uttered the words in her softest drawl, and Falls laughed with sheer delight.

"Those are unanswerable arguments!" he exclaimed gaily, "but oddly unconvincing! I offer all this—" he waved his hand to the night—"in rebuttal!"

"Why, it is much, mu-ch farther than the rose garden!" Joan swept her skirts into one hand, and, standing poised upon the steps, interrogated the sweet-scented bosky gloom below with suspicious eyes. "It is dewy down there," she declared, and made one step toward the outstretched hand, "and briery," another step, "and earwiggy!"

She laid her rosy palm in Falls's broad one, which closed upon it and transferred it to his arm. Her sweet, averted

eyes still lingered upon the gloom below. Falls laughed softly:

"And snakey, if I 'm any judge! But you may count on the last drop of my blood being shed in your defense against the dangers which beset our path! I will engage in single combat any earwig which lurks in this garden; and should the fierce and deadly snail leap upon us from its lair I have—I think I have—my trusty envelope-opener!"

"You are almost as absurd as Hugh," said Joan. "I am not in the least afraid of that sort of thing. The reason I hesitated was because—"

There was so much of finality in the pause that Falls decided he had been answered by a bit of the hereditary logic of her sex, until she finished the sentence, suavely: "—of malaria."

The arches of the arbor opened four-square to the night, and the June moonlight painted with faithful pencil upon its tiled floor a delicate tracery of half-opened leaf and curling tendril; curtains of pale purple bloom shut out the world; the summer night encompassed them. The south wind, warmed by the June sun, magnetized by the Gulf Stream, fraught with the perfume of leagues of roses and acres of jasmine, thrilling with the pulse of this passionate land, warm from the heart of Dixie—the south wind caught them to its bosom.

It grasped Joan's filmy skirts and wrapped them in clinging folds about Falls; it dashed the froth of her laces on his bosom, the floating tendrils of her hair across his cheek.

With cunning fingers it parted the roof of bloom and coaxed a moonbeam through to linger upon the curve of

Joan's cheek, the ivory column of her throat, downward to where it melted into the soft swell of her bosom, dimly visible under the gauzy folds of her gown.

Falls, glancing about in the dusk within, seized upon an ancient garden-seat which had retired from the garish light of day, conscious of its many infirmities, and haled it forth with triumph.

"Unblushing usurper!" protested Joan, from the steps, and watching Falls with laughing eyes, as he propped the ancient seat for her reception.

"By what right do you lay claim to my hereditary goods and chattels?" she demanded.

"I have some hereditary rights myself," said Falls, groping in the gloom for bricks; "the right of might is the one I am exercising just now."

"What would my great-grandfather Adair say if he could hear you! He put that bench there—"

"If what I have heard of him is at all authentic he would say it was 'a damned poor specimen of a bench, sur!'" said Falls calmly, and striking the key-note of the old Admiral's habitual profanity so neatly, that Joan had a sharp struggle to preserve her gravity and with it her sense of loyalty to the old life of which this crumbling remnant was a fragment.

"It was quite a handsome bench in its day," she protested staunchly, "it was — er — quite unique!"

"Ah, so it must have been!" murmured Falls with gentle sarcasm, "fine old Southern stock, sur — neither back nor legs!"

"It had a back and legs — but the Yankee soldiers during the wah —" a dead pause; even in the moonlight Falls could see the blush.

"Come in,—Aurora!" he called to her; "I think I have persuaded the last of your ancestral earwigs that he has an engagement elsewhere, and he has hurried off like a veritable Southern gentleman, an hour late, to keep it!"

Joan's eyes as she came in were a trifle speculative, and warm with hidden laughter.

"You look like a convolvulus after the sun has kissed it, with your petals all folded up like that," Falls told her, as she came daintily in still holding her skirts tightly sheathed about her.

"I 'm a moon-flower," she cried gaily, "and it 's time to open!" Releasing her soft, frilled skirts with a gay whirl, she sank upon the old bench, which groaned its protest.

"Gently, gently," Falls admonished her, as he steadied the rickety seat, "you 're worse than the Federal troops! You 'll lay low this monument which my alien hand has just erected in honor of — Dixie!" They sat facing the long dip of valley land which lay wrapped in its robe of blue-gray shadows, almost at their feet. Across the valley to the north the mountains lay, like crouching beasts.

"Tell me," he said softly to the girl beside him, his eyes still on the horizon guarded by those dim, watching forms, "what *is* this Dixie? I asked Hallett, but I could get nothing from him but maundering! He quoted Rudyard Kipling, he raved of the noble dead, and of noble dividends in a breath, he — I 'm not sure but he wept!"

"Over the dividends! But — Is this authentic? Mr. Hallett and — sentiment? I thought Mr. Hallett was of the New South; I did not know he knew Dixie!"

"No more he does! That much I gathered from his wanderings; he opines that no one does; he confessed that he could not interpret for me; that he could not, even yet, speak the mother tongue. He only—ah, *feels it!*"

"Mr. Hallett!" so much of keen incredulity spoke in the girl's tone, that Falls laughed softly in the gloom.

"Is not Hallett a man like any other? Do you deny him any human susceptibility?"

"No," she said serenely; "I accord him the most human! A very human and a very keen susceptibility—as to what he can make out of Dixie."

"You hit hard!" said Falls under his breath. "But—But you said 'her'; do you, then, think of Dixie as a woman?"

"Do not you?"

"I? I do not know what to think! I am not yet even of the New South. I am of Wall Street. You are her daughter, are you not? You were cradled upon Dixie's bosom; you speak the mother language. Will you not be my interpreter?"

"How can I put into language that which has neither speech nor language of its own? I could not define Dixie any more than I could explain nostalgia! I could not even tell you, as Mr. Hallett did, that it extends from the Ohio River to the Gulf—for it does not! There are great tracts within that area which are just simply—Florida and Texas—Georgia—not Dixie at all! Dixie is a feeling, you know—a belief, a sentiment. Like the German Vaterland. And where those currents of feeling set strongest and swiftest, in the Sargasso seas of feeling, as it were, there—there is Dixie! This," she flung her hand out to the dim land about her, to the white stars

overhead, to the perfumed air, "this, is the very heart of Dixie!"

"Is it all as fair as this?" asked Falls, his slow pulses thrilling under the charm of her voice, his eyes upon her rapt face.

"N-o," said she slowly and a little coldly; "Sargasso seas — or so they told me at school — harbor all sorts of flotsam and jetsam of the oceans; whirlpools of feeling obey the same laws! But we must be going up, must we not? We want to hear Hugh speak!"

"Aye," said Falls heartily, "we do!" And mentally he added just as heartily, "Confound Watson!"

"Joan," said Hugh, leaning across Falls to speak under cover of the jubilant strains of "Dixie," as the evening drew to its close, "what is this I hear about a dance? There are a lot of fellows over there on the end of the colonnade, who never walked out here to sing 'Dixie'! It took more than patriotism to pull Hale up that hill; and Jemmy 's got his glad rags on! They 've come to dance; that 's patent. What did you say, Joan — 'Father'? . . . Joan, my child, try not thy futile arts of dissimulation upon me, exercise your infant wiles upon Falls's innocence! Don't I know that the first strain of 'Dixie' sends Uncle John up-stairs? He goes up there and hugs his old sword and cusses," he added in an explanatory aside to Falls.

"Hugh! What will Mr. Falls think! Father ne-ver! Yes, Challie, I see him; let 's go across."

Judge Adair gave Falls his hand with courteous ease which recalled his daughter's manner, accompanied by a glance which classified, appraised, and dismissed him in

a breath. Falls had met many of the men present, and the greeting of the rest was for the most part a replica of Judge Adair's manner — perhaps a trifle colder — and with more hostile scrutiny.

In the group about the hall door, talk of the dance went on with liveliest interest.

"It is debatable ground, boys," said Judge Adair, "distinctly debatable ground. We have met here to render a tribute to the Confederate dead —"

"Well—" said Jemmy Page, driven to a desperate expedient in the way of argument, "if they 're half the men I 've been led to believe all *my* life, they 'd be the last sort to want to cut us out of any fun!"

"Really, Uncle John," said Hugh, "I see no impropriety in the occasion — and the occasion is over, besides!"

Judge Adair visibly wavered. "I do not sanction it, you know — I — er — only allow it; and, Hugh, you will explain to the ladies of the Confederacy?"

Hugh fixed the older man with a glance of keen amusement. "The chicken-heartedness of the Confederate veteran under fire surprises me! The 49th Alabama would not own you to see you quail before Mrs. Jones! But thank God, there 's life in the old land yet! I 'll engage her — I 'll dance with her, bloody shirt and all! You may go to bed, Uncle John, I 'll look after things."

"Challie," said the old man, and beckoned Hugh aside, "who is this new man — this Falls — whom Joan is leading about like a lamb on a ribbon?"

Watson's smile broadened. "Of all the inapposite — If you had said a unicorn! I think Falls is the most unlamblike individual I have ever met! Hallett brought him here."

"Hallett?"

"It is all right, I think, Uncle John; Joan met Hallett with Falls down-town and invited them—or rather let Hallett invite himself—to come out. I'm rather taken with Falls—he does not impress me as being of the type of our usual Northern contingent. Hallett tells me he has bought the old Power and Passenger Company—means to run it himself. I always did like a man with gall! . . . What do you think?"

"I think a fool and his money are soon parted. Good night, Challie."

II

A WOMAN AND A WALTZ

“WE dance up-stairs, Mr. Falls,” said Joan, sending Falls a smile from the landing as she went about her duties of hostess, collecting the scattered guests and marshaling them up-stairs.

“Jemmy,” — she waved her escort gaily toward Falls, — “I think I can find my way about the house by this time! Won’t you show Mr. Falls the way?”

“I perceive that you are on detail duty, Mr. Page,” said Falls, smiling gravely upon the lad, “but do not let me spoil the evening for you. I was just admiring this fine old hall!”

“Is n’t it fine? I believe Hillcrest is considered the best of the ante-bellum houses left us, now. Egypt — that’s our place just out of town — used to be this sort; but father — father is rather progressive — had it torn down and a decent house put up, with steam heat, where one can be comfortable, you know —”

“Is n’t it a good deal of a pity, though?” asked Falls idly.

“No,” said the boy, sturdily, “the quicker we get rid of the old régime the better it will be for us! ‘Forward, forward, let us range!’”

"I see you are of the New South!"

"Indeed I am! I do not hold with the Bourbon creed that never learns and never forgets! Do you care to dance, Mr. Falls? I will introduce you to any of the girls— You have met Betty—but Hugh would not stand that! There's Miss Comer—she's a new girl—the very topmost straw on the swim in New Orleans!"

"They are all new to me," said Falls, laughing; "later, Mr. Page, if you will be so kind?" And his detail departed to seek his own young pleasure.

The ballroom was in the third story, its windows opening to the floor upon a wide, deck-like gallery, with a skylight flung open to the starlit reaches of the summer night. It was bare of furniture except for a row of dark portraits which paneled the wall-spaces between the windows, and a huge chandelier from whose many branches hung tinkling, ice-like prisms. The floor was of polished wood, ideal for dancing, and was comfortably filled with dancers when Falls and young Page entered.

Falls watched the scene from the gallery, bored, but lingering he knew not why. Watson passed him in animated talk with a woman on his arm whom Falls instantly decided must be Mrs. Eldridge-Jones. He looked at her critically, striving to analyze the feeling of dislike and antagonism which had taken instant possession of his mind as his eyes rested upon her.

She was a tall woman, almost as tall as Hugh himself, and of imposing presence. She was clad to-night in sweeping robes of some airy black which swam about her as she moved, and from her bosom came a flash-light of jewels, a great cross of diamonds, suspended just below a loose and pendent fold of flesh which depended from

her wrinkled throat; her abundant white hair was turned back in a full roll from her bold, angular face—a face whose shrewd capableness was weakened and marred by an expression of egotism, bred in her, doubtless, by the narrow life of a local celebrity; arrogance, an overweening personal conceit, spoke in her manner, which sought, under the elaborate mannerisms of a bygone generation, to conceal a conscious insolence of caste. She walked beside Hugh with teetering footsteps and airy graces, her bold eyes, under languishing lids, sweeping the room keenly, with the glance of a general upon the battle-field.

Joan was waltzing with a veteran whose white head towered above that of every other man in the room except Falls. Gay groups passed and repassed him upon the gallery, while from within came the wailing of the violins, the soft hiss of gliding feet upon the polished floor, the flutter of light gowns, soft laughter, the sweet familiar give and take of people who met at ease in genial intercourse.

"I seem to have strayed into some family reunion," thought Falls. "One turn—I'll go after I've had it."

Joan was beaming a farewell smile upon her veteran when Falls bent his tall head beside her.

"Will you risk a partner who has not waltzed for ten years, Miss Adair?"

She rose at once, and they paused to catch the time.

"I never refuse your sort of man as a partner," she told him.

Falls swept her out upon the current of the music with a strong glide, and Joan caught her breath with sheer delight in the cadenced motion. They had almost completed the circuit of the room before Falls spoke.

"What sort of man is my sort?"

"Strong, you know — and all that!"

"Oh!" smiled Falls, "that! Any navvy can have muscle!" he murmured, ungratefully, after a minute. Glancing down he could see one rosy ear, the curve of a delicate cheek and a length of dreaming lashes; but it is doubtful if he was conscious of a single detail of her loveliness. Like a strong swimmer upon a sun-warmed sea, Falls was letting himself drift, deliberately — letting the current of the moment sweep him on; he would turn back soon, to the workaday world. He felt the buoyant softness of Joan's form within his arm, saw the billows of her skirts about his feet with a reflex consciousness only.

Joan, with a momentary congratulation that her partner did not care to talk, abandoned herself to the pleasure of the waltz. The floor was perfect; the air, cooling toward midnight, swept downward from the mountain-tops in great sighing breaths; she could feel the smooth play of Falls's muscles supporting her, and close to her was the black shoulder of his coat.

Lulled by the motion she abandoned herself dreamily to a childish memory which had assailed her after the first of Falls's long, smooth glides.

"This is the North Wind's hair, black and drooping, which is about me," she thought dreamily; "this is his strong arm holding me; we are far out upon the dark blue billows of the air!" She knew that Falls's eyes were just above her, that if she lifted her own she would look straight into the black depths of his, and she wished that she might do so.

She longed to break through that strong quiet of his; to know what lay behind his grave, restrained glance. Was

it indifference? The thought but skimmed the surface of her mind, dipping downward, as a swallow might, to touch a memory here and there. No, it was not indifference. A curtain dropped between the man's proud, reserved soul and the world? It might be. Fatima-like, Joan longed to lift its edge! "Suppose," she dallied with her girlish fancy, "suppose I tilted back my head and looked at him and said, like this: 'Dear North Wind, I am frightened; the roofs of the great city are so far below us!' What would happen, I wonder?"

On the cheek beneath Falls's abstracted eyes a dimple glanced, and vanished.

"What is it?" he said instantly. "What amuses you?" She started, and the smile flashed fully out.

"Nothing—you would not find it amusing!"

"I'm not nearly so dull as I look! If it is not very metaphysical I could make a stagger at it! I understood the dimple quite well!"

"Some day—" she lightly evaded him.

"Many things by season, seasoned are," he reminded her.

He had an instant's glimpse of eyes which laughed.

"The present would add rather too much pungency," she said frankly.

"When, then?"

"In a year and a day—"

"Is n't that rather a Delphic promise?"

"Perhaps."

"Where did Joan get this man, Hugh?" asked Mrs. Eldridge-Jones, indicating with a skilled turn of her eye Falls's tall figure waltzing within, his grave face as still

as though cast in bronze, with steady eyes upon his partner's charming profile.

"I think Joan had him made in New York — to go with her Redfern gown that Uncle John gave her on her birthday the other week!" replied Hugh, his tone of careful precision implying that, while his information might be a trifle inaccurate, it was, for all practical purposes, reliable.

"Ah —" she said with acrid complacency, "I had decided that he was a New Yorker, he is coarse-grained — as all New Yorkers are! Who is he — to whom did he bring letters here, that he is received at Hillcrest?"

Watson turned an eye of speculative amusement upon her, from the security of the dark gallery. "His name is Falls; that is, I think, all that can be predicated of him thus far; except that he has bought the old Power and Passenger plant —"

Her great fan of dusky feathers hung suspended, as she turned toward Watson in the semigloom of the gallery, the diamond cross upon her bosom shaking out a dazzle of indignant, scintillant sparks to match the angry sparkle of her eyes.

"An electric light man! Waltzing here — with Jack Adair's daughter? What — what *are* we coming to!"

There was real feeling in her tones; a passion of regret shook them into sincerity as she went on:

"Of what use for the few of us to struggle to maintain the old customs, the old order of things? I have set my face from the first against this new system of things, but what use? If John Adair — ! I told Colonel Jones only the other day when he asked me again to invite this Mr. Hallett to dine — "

"Why, the Colonel and Hallett are as chummy as possible," began Hugh.

"Ah, that is another matter! That is business; men meet each other on a different plane in business. Why, even befo' the wah men were associated in business with others of quite a different stamp. Our overseers when they came up on business were always kindly treated. But this 'new element,' as it calls itself! Never, as I told Colonel Jones, never will my doors open to one of them!"

"Are we never to grow any, Mrs. Jones? Never learn to forget?"

"Never!" she made firm answer, her handsome, vindictive old face rigid with anger. "My growing days are over, Hugh, and I learned more than I shall ever forget in those four years! Remember, boy, what I lost before you talk to me of forgetting: my husband—a Senator of his State—my lovely sons, my magnificent plantations—my negroes, even my jewels!" Her hard tones trembled into tenderness, and Watson smiled again, thankful for the darkness which hid his amusement at her anticlimax.

In the silence which lasted a moment, they saw Falls bend to speak to his partner, saw the smile, the glance, with which she answered him.

"The question with me is, Hugh," she resumed with a slow significance, her eyes still bitterly following Falls's handsome figure, "the question with me is how does the admission of these people constitute growth? To me it seems dissolution—disintegration! We do not really assimilate them; and the result is conflict—friction; where if we merely decline to admit them—go our way—let them go theirs!"

"Yes," said Watson slowly; "it does mean disintegration; and it is disintegration that we want! The old South, the South that you knew and loved, is dead, Mrs. Jones! We cannot reanimate dry bones; disintegration precedes growth always. 'The grain is not quickened, except it die.' And why should Falls be difficult of assimilation?"

"He is a Yankee—"

Watson turned his brilliant glance upon her, full of ironical chiding. "Tut!" said he in a tone which made of the word a caress. "Tut, Mrs. Jones, bury your old squirrel gun! 'Weep no more, my lady, weep no more!' Accept the inevitable with the courage with which you accepted the war. Retaliate upon the past by the conquest of the future. We are coming out ahead in this new war of capital! And about Falls—I 'm going to introduce him; he has n't any women!" he added with a smile.

"That is certainly in his favor; the men are bad enough, but the women! . . . No, no, Hugh, no introductions for me!"

"That hint is not quite pointed enough, Betty," said Hugh, as Betty stepped inside her own gate and clicked it together after her, "I 'm coming in!"

"It is very late, Hugh; had you better?"

"It is for *you* to say whether I had better! But, I think it only fair to warn you, in the event I do not I shall kiss you out here!"

"Hugh, the hill is full of people!"

She swung the gate open and stepped aside, but Watson did not move.

"You will have to invite me, now; I am offended. You have wantonly injured my tenderest—"

"Challie!" in agonized remonstrance, "Mrs. Eldridge-Jones and the Colonel are coming down the hill!"

"Good night, Mrs. Jones," said Watson, urbanely, ignoring her piercing glance at Betty's shrinking figure endeavoring to conceal itself behind the slender iron post of the gate. "Howdy, Colonel . . . Well, Miss Archer, since you insist—" this in the bored tone of a guest being detained against his will, with laughing eyes of cruel fun upon the girl, "why — er — I *will* come in a moment to see the night-blooming cereus—" He followed Betty to the quaint hooded porch draped with Banksia roses into whose depths she had vanished. Watson made one or two cautious, stumbling, near-sighted steps into the gloom and found himself in Betty's hostile grasp.

"My darling, this is assault and battery!"

"Oh, Challie!" cried the girl, pounding him viciously with soft fists, "why on earth did you ever think of saying that idiotic thing where she could hear you? Did I ever, ever 'insist' — in my life, on a man's coming in?"

"Betty darling, don't be tragic!"

He drew her softly to him, and in his strong embrace she grew happy again and was so quiet that he fancied she had forgotten the little rift, until she raised her head at last with a happy, exasperated sigh.

"But you know, Hughie, you are simply, simply unspeakable!"

"I 'm glad I am — with you; you are just the one person on earth with whom I prefer to be inarticulate. I think the sign language is far nicer between us, don't you?" He laid his cheek against hers and gathered her

closer into his arms, until he felt the hurried beating of her heart upon his own, and was silent. So silent that the interested audience of earwigs and granddaddies and hairy worms that lived in Betty's porch, and knew to a shade the exact standing of each of Betty's suitors, retired disappointed to humdrum domesticity in their cracks and crannies, and to unromantic slumbers.

"Challie, do you really, really love me?" murmured Betty, the old doubt, the old question, old as love, old as life, in her voice.

Watson, disdaining speech, preferring the sign language, found her mouth in the darkness and softly closed it with his own.

"Best, I mean — and only?"

"Best, and only, Betty!"

"Did you never — never even *fancy*?"

"Never!"

The girl nestled closer, with a happy, contented sigh. But Watson sat as though carved in stone, his cheek against Betty's soft love-locks, his wide eyes, blankly upon the moonlit spaces of the garden, filled with a memory as bitter as a curse.

"You know, Hugh," Betty went on after a moment of this silence, "I always thought it silly for a woman to try to claim her lover's past, and — and I do not! But I was just thinking, how lucky I am! We've known each other all our lives; and if there had ever been — I'd be certain to have heard about it, would n't I, Challie? Why, I can remember back, when you first came home from college and lived at Judge Adair's — when your Aunt Felicia was living — I was only a little girl, then, never d-r-e-a-ming that you would ever — ever! . . . Did

you love me in those days? Yes? How delightful! How dear of you! And when I consider — ”

“ Your own string of scalps! ” put in Hugh gravely, rousing himself. “ Let ’s leave the past alone, Betty, shall we? We have the present, and the future, please God! Who burns a light, so late? ” he went on to turn her from the subject.

“ Rose, ” she answered carelessly; “ she will wait up for me. She is my maid now.”

“ Rose? What Rose? I don’t remember — ”

“ Rosebud, you know. But papa thought it improper for a servant to be called Rosebud; and I think it is just as well,” finished Betty with a pretty primness.

“ Is Rosebud *here?* ” asked Hugh. Rising, he put Betty’s hands away from his neck and stepped beyond the porch as though to gain a moment’s breathing space from something which oppressed him.

“ Yes, ” said Betty, “ she wanted to come, and father let me have her. She makes a splendid servant — I’m going to say good night now, Hughie” . . .

III

THE DARK THREAD IN THE WOOF

THE rose-gallery at Hillcrest was Joan's special pet and pride and the favorite resort for family and guests during the hot months of summer, which Joan and her father were spending this year in town, with brief visits to Judge Adair's mountain house in the heart of the blue-green mountains that overlooked the valley behind Hillcrest.

On a morning late in August, Joan lay in her rose-red hammock behind the curtain of vines, tapestried with ten thousand roses, through which the light filtered in a dim green shade, admiring her own slim feet, very much in evidence, several inches higher than the golden crown which was slipping down her shoulders.

Joan cast a handful of rose and gold and scarlet petals to a baby wind to make fairy boats of, and watched them careen across the polished floor of the gallery, but her thoughts were all of wedding-clothes, and her talk, not of the sunsets which trailed their gorgeous banners behind the purple peaks, but of hemstitching, of herring-boning, of hand-made lingerie, couched in terms of edgings and insertions, and of mystic numbers which made "sets" of such and such.

For Betty's wedding-clothes were in progress, and Betty herself was present, emerging like another, and more domestic, Aphrodite from a pile of fluffy stuff which trailed upon the gallery floor, and which Betty's slim fingers crimped and pinched and tugged at most unkindly. Within the cavern of the black hall, Joan's prime minister, Milly Ann, presided at a sewing-machine, from which she evoked long writhing strips of the same fluffy stuff, and which presently Betty would take in hand.

Farther within the cavern stood the girl Rosebud, now primly pruned to "Rose," who cut, with shining shears and a skilled hand, length after length of the same diaphanous white which clung, writhing and fluttering, to the shears as though in pain, or in anticipation of the time when it, too, must pass beneath that keen needle under Betty's caressing fingers.

And all of this — that Betty might tread that straight and narrow pass which leads from maidenhood to wifehood, fortified with the strength which comes to a bride only with the knowledge of hand-made lingerie!

The houses of Adair and Archer had allied themselves until such time as Betty might deem herself sufficiently equipped to progress to the end of the block in which she had spent her life, and begin life anew among the same people whom she had regularly subjugated each season, since she had been out of short frocks, with one-fourth the costumes which now seemed necessary to carry on her conquests as Mrs. Hugh Chalmers Watson.

"Rosebud — er — I mean Rose," said Joan kindly, to the girl who had come out to speak to Betty, "don't you think you had better give up this idea of going off to college, and stop here and be Miss Betty's housemaid after

she is married? And then the wedding, you 'll miss it all! And what 's the use of being educated? You are much nicer as you are. I can't st-a-and those educated darkies, with note-books in their hands and eye-glasses! They b-o-re me to death!"

"Yes," placidly joined in Betty — "Put it over my shoulder, Rosie; is it long enough? Yes, I have been talking to Rose about this foolish idea; it is simply silly! She can read and write, can't you, Rosie? And that is enough!"

"M-o-re than enough," chimed in Joan heartily; "I would not have an educated nigger—" She caught the flush which rose to the girl's clear, golden cheek, and added in eager depreciation of her careless speech, "Not that Rose could ever be like the ones I mean."

Rosebud had not spoken, beyond a smile to Joan and a gentle glance at Betty.

"Where are you going, Rosebud?" asked Joan with a kindly interest, intended to make amends for her careless speech.

"I 'm going to Oberlin, Ohio, to the college there," replied the girl.

Both Joan and Betty started, and in the glance which both bent upon the girl, sewing quietly, there was astonishment; in Betty's, suspicion, as well. Rosebud's misty dark eyes with their puzzling likeness to some one — a likeness which always eluded Joan just when she thought she knew — met their own with impenetrable frankness. The same question met her in the eyes of both Betty and Joan. It began upon Joan's lip, faltered, died; before the gentle reticence of that quiet glance it had seemed an impertinence. Where had she encountered, before, the

courteous challenge of that glance? Somehow, oddly, Joan seemed a little child again, restrained, controlled by it! Oh, what—where had she known it? Betty persevered, unwarmed by the glance which had repulsed Joan, holding her long white neck a little straighter, and with a veiled suspicion in her childlike eyes, but in a rather guarded tone; for the girl was not in the ordinary sense her servant. Upon Rosebud's part it was a voluntary service, and upon Betty's the protection which her home and her influence over the girl afforded. It was not, therefore, the reprimand of a mistress to a servant, which had brought the worried frown to Betty's fair face, so much as the responsibility she felt for the girl's welfare. And Rosebud understood.

There was amusement, reassurance, gratitude, adoration almost, in the glance she turned upon Betty; and something more: a restrained dignity, as of one who suffered in silence an injury from a loved hand, refraining from speech which might wound.

"But, Rose," she persisted, "it costs a great deal of money to go so far away; and then such a college! Why, where can you find the money, child?"

Rosebud's eyes met Betty's with the same frank reserve. "I've been teaching some," she said, "and I shall work at the college. I'm a good hand in the laundry."

Betty drew a sigh of relief. "Of course—that! Well, if you will go, Rosie, I'm going to miss you! I'll make Milly Ann send you a piece of my wedding-cake."

"Thank you, Miss Betty," said Rosebud, gently; and, was it tears in those soft, inscrutable eyes?

"Rosie," said Joan, as she and Betty passed within, leaving the two girls at their task, "come to my room

before you go to-day. My things used just to fit you; and I 've a good many last winter things for you. If you are going to Ohio you must be fixed up."

There was always this dainty practicality about Joan. Betty patted the head of the ragged urchin who came to sell blackberries or, it might be, a mocking-bird in a cigar-box, and smiled her delicious smile upon him, but Joan's invariable formula for such occasions was, "Run to the kitchen, honey, and tell Liddy to give you some cake!"

The library into which the two girls turned was a spacious room, as were all the old-fashioned rooms at Hillcrest, with high, frescoed ceiling, and a floor polished with what Watson declared to be "homicidal intent." Joan was a notable housekeeper, and no spot in all Adairville was so attractive during the long summers as were the dim, cool rooms at Hillcrest. There seemed always a breeze just outside the long windows waiting to sway the curtains softly to and fro; the glare of the brazen noons was tempered to cool, green shade by rose-hung galleries and Venetian blinds.

Within was the coolness of polished wood, hushed to silence by deep rugs, and the cold gleam of stately marble mantels and hearths. The touch of the gay young chatelaine was visible everywhere, softening the old-time stateliness of the spacious rooms, while leaving untouched the dignity of their simple lines and wide, cool spaces. There were low cane chairs lined with Joan's favorite rose-red cushions, and low cane couches piled with them; big Nankeen bowls of roses filled the air with sweetness, and tall, draped lamps stood about in corners and at night assisted the gloom.

"Here are two of them!" cried Betty, standing by the table in the hall with two bits of pasteboard in her hand.

"Two visiting-cards — 'Mr. Gregory Falls.' I like his boldness!" she added as she tossed the cards back into the tray.

"So do I," said Joan with suspicious mildness; "that's what I have always liked in Mr. Falls — his manliness."

"I said boldness," persisted Betty, ignoring the quiet challenge conveyed in Joan's level-voiced reply; "to call here twice, an electric light man! When did he call, Joan?"

"Some time ago; soon after he was here — that night, you remember? He called both times in the afternoon, and I was out, both times, I regret to say," she added firmly. "I liked what I saw of him very much."

Joan's tone was careless; not too careless, however, for Betty's gentian blue eyes were not to be trifled with upon occasions.

"Hugh likes Mr. Falls —" she added tentatively, curling herself comfortably among the cushions of a couch and lifting a tiny jet-black kitten from the floor to share it with her.

"Oh, that's business! Hugh is Mr. Falls's lawyer, he has to go with him some; but socially, Hugh would not dream of such a thing! You see, he has never brought him to call on me."

"Perhaps —" began Joan, and paused with a little flush. Betty laughed lightly; she was too thoroughly in love with Hugh, and too absolutely content with his love for her, to be nettled by the meaning implied in the hiatus.

"Maybe not," lightly, "but," with smiling malice, "I

think it is far more probable that by this time Mr. Gregory Falls of New York, New York, has been too pointedly instructed that, in Adairville, electric light men don't go into society, to say nothing of Yankees and nigger-loving Republicans!"

Joan started up among her cushions, holding the kitten curled into a sulky comma in her hand, and facing Betty with horrified, angry eyes.

"Betty," she cried, "how unjust! How, how outrageous! How dare you say such dreadful things?"

"You need n't be angry with *me*, Jo," pleaded Betty pacifically, somewhat awed by Joan's fire; "it's not *me* — any more than every one! Everybody is talking about it!"

"About what?" cried Joan, sitting very erect among her cushions, unconsciously waving the limp kitten in angry protest. "What has Mr. Falls done to have the whole of Adairville down upon him? Mr. Falls is nothing to me, of course, but I hate — simply hate — injustice and narrow-mindedness, and this petty, this despicable sectional prejudice!"

"But Joan, you *know* Mr. Falls is a Yankee!"

"Of course I know that he is from somewhere in New England. But what e-a-rthly difference does it make?"

"He's a Republican; and all Republicans believe in negro equality!"

"Pooh!" in quick scorn, "how p-e-r-fectly r-i-diculous! That sort of talk is what Hugh calls 'sedge-field Democracy.' I'd be ashamed to own it!"

"I'd be ashamed to defend a man who would put negroes over the heads of white men! The whole town is furious about it! Mr. Falls took off Joe Bowers — you know

Joe Bowers? I had him in my Sunday-school class—and put a nigger, a b-l-a-ck nigger, in his place to run cars for white people!"

A troubled frown crossed Joan's brow.

"I had not heard," she said slowly; "but it is only a mistake, Betty! He does not understand, that is all! I suppose Joe was no good—he is not, you know, Betty! Joe Bowers is the most trifling creature on earth; there is not a respectable negro in town that is not better! Mr. Falls saw negroes driving all sorts of things, carriages with ladies, and all that. And really, Betty, what is the difference? Don't you and I drive out every day with negro drivers? Why, lots of times I sit right on the seat beside Zeke—Zeke puts me on my Ritchie every time I ride!"

"It 's different," declared Betty. "The way Zeke puts you on your horse is just as if he was a step-ladder—or a mounting-block!"

"Not at all! I like Zeke; he is a human being. I know he feels kindly to me, and I 'm glad he does! I value his respect; I would not knowingly do anything to forfeit it. And I do not so regard the step-ladder!"

"How can you defend him, Joan?" cried Betty hotly, "a man who associates with negroes! Would you receive him if you knew he went with negroes?"

"Betty, you will give me nervous prostration with your folly—your wicked folly! You know in your heart you no more believe Gregory Falls associates with negroes than you believe it of Hugh! What is all this about him, Betty? Tell me what your father says?"

"He 's dreadfully unpopular—"

"Unpopular? Pooh! You cannot pick a flaw in him!"

"I cannot in his clothes, I grant that, Joan! I l-o-v-e the way he dresses! He 's the best groomed man in town. And I like the way he parts his hair —"

"Diogenes, scratch Betty!" cried Joan to the tiny cat lying upon her arm blinking at her with the jeweled eyes of an Eastern idol.

"But he is so big and gloomy; and he stands about and takes up so much room! And then, you know, negro equality, that's awful, Joan!"

"*Big!*" cried Joan. "That sounds well from you, Betty Archer! A woman who will have to give Hugh Watson house-room for the rest of her life! Diogenes, scratch Betty, *hard!*"

IV

“ WHERE IS WOMAN’S FANCY BRED ? ”

“ FATHER,” called Joan from where she knelt upon the grassy border of the lawn, transplanting chrysanthemums for the winter garden, “ father, what is all this about Mr. Falls ? ”

“ What ? ” asked Judge Adair, his voice coming from the rustling caverns of his daily paper.

“ This,” explained Joan lucidly, waving the flabby sheet which she had found a moment before in the dewy grass.

“ Why not read it, dear ? ” inquired her father kindly and provokingly; secretly hoping to be left in peace about a matter of which he really knew little and which he did not care at all to discuss.

“ I am — I mean I have ; but it is rather odd, is n’t it, father ? I do not seem to be able to understand it.”

“ No more can I — no more can any one ! ” replied Judge Adair succinctly, and raised his paper an inch higher.

Silence reigned for five minutes ; unbroken save for the blue jays, who screamed their joyous maledictions across the sunny air, and the rustle of Judge Adair’s paper as he waded more and more deeply into the current of reportorial imaginings.

"But, father!" Once more the sweet, insistent voice dragged the reluctant Judge Adair remorselessly from those enticing columns. "I thought Mr. Falls owned the electric light plant, and the cars — and everything —"

"So he does, I think."

"Well?"

Perceiving that the end was not yet, Judge Adair laid down his paper definitely; and, unconsciously adopting the tone of bored resignation which men use in elucidating the mysteries of business complications to women, he said, "The affair, as I understand it, amounts to this: Falls — who is a most unpopular man — bought this electric light and power business from the old company, that had formerly owned and failed to operate it successfully here, under the impression that he could in some way do what they had failed to do, under exactly the same conditions. That is all, really, that there is to it."

"It seems to me," said the girl, prodding deep little wells in the soft mould with the handle of her trowel, "that they are more bitter against Mr. Falls than they were toward the old company. Is it so, do you think, father? And, what has he done?"

"Well, yes; the town is very bitter against Falls; it is a difficult matter to explain. It has its roots deep down among the ineradicables; it is sectional prejudice, of course, but — daughter, I do not say this out in town, you know — as long as you have asked me, Falls has done nothing, really; thought he could run his business to suit himself, and by the same methods which he would use, say, in Manchester, or California, or New England, without taking cognizance of Frazier and the City Fathers generally. Then that street-car business — the negro

motorman; that has aroused most bitter feeling. Falls's methods are not what are called conciliatory, I believe."

"Can any one prevent a man from running his business to suit himself?" inquired Joan, a new light as to business procedure breaking in upon her mind, and astonishment and indignation mingling in her voice.

"That seems to be the question before Adairville just now." Judge Adair waved his hand toward the paper which she still held. "Is it Falls's business or is it the town's? Falls owns the plant and pays its expenses, and undoubtedly he thinks he can run it to suit himself, for he is doing it!" A gentle laugh gleamed in the old man's eyes. "I cannot help admiring what Hugh calls his 'sand.' But, unfortunately, Adairville is his partner whether he likes it or no, and if that partner pulls out!"

"I think it was rather fine in Mr. Falls to put Will-Henry back after he had received the notice from the city, don't you, father?"

"Yes," said he slowly; "why, yes, child, it was fine, in the abstract! It was as fine a bit of real, tough, wrong-headed manliness as I have ever known. But it was crassly impolitic. And Adairville is not going to put up with it!"

Joan flung the trowel from her and, leaving her plants to wither upon the ground, came upon the gallery and seated herself upon the broad arm of her father's chair.

"Father"—with her lovely head upon one side Joan subjected Judge Adair to a critically absent-minded inspection, adjusting his tie, with deft fingers, patting it softly into place as though it had been a bonnet-string—"father, this is only a mistake that Mr. Falls is making, don't you think so? But it will get him into trouble, will it not?"

"I think he is in a fair way to have trouble — yes!"

"Why does not some one tell him, explain about things here?"

"Falls is not a boy in roundabouts, Joan, playing marbles. He is a hard, shrewd man of the world, and he plays his game as such; he must take what the world has for him. It is no one's business; he would not thank any one to interfere — would not put up with it!"

"I thought Challie —"

"Hugh is his lawyer and, I think, his friend. If there is any one in the place who could influence Falls it would be Hugh; but in matters like this, the way he runs his business — the stand he chooses to take to the town — those matters are not in Hugh's jurisdiction."

"Not as a lawyer, perhaps, but as his friend, don't you think, father?"

Joan was still pursuing her rigidly absent-minded inspection; she blew a fleck of dust off her father's coat, touched his thick, silvery hair, smoothed a wrinkle out of his handsome, firm old cheek with one rosy forefinger. "I never *could* bear old Mr. Jim Frazier, could you, father? And what has he to do with Mr. Falls, anyhow?"

"Frazier is a member of the City Council, and he has what the negroes call 'fluence,' big 'fluence, in business circles here. He and Falls differed about the privileges, I understand."

"Privileges?" with a straight furrow in her white brow over perplexed eyes.

"It had been the custom," went on Judge Adair calmly, but with an eye in which a twinkle lurked, deep down, fixed upon his daughter's interested face, "it had been the usual custom — at least, the other company did it —

to allow the members of the City Council all sorts of perquisites: free lighting of homes and offices, passes the year round on the cars and all that; but Falls — unlucky devil! — cut it off; and even ” — he paused to laugh with keen enjoyment — “ even had the gall to send in bills! No-o! It is only business, I believe. . . . Well, perhaps not; but I am not a business man!”

The paper had been abandoned; the old man’s shrewd, tender smile rested upon the girl as, with roused and indignant partisanship, she argued the question of Falls’s abstract rights in a matter where abstract right entered as little as analytical chemistry, as Judge Adair very thoroughly understood; and whose issues were fixed, as he believed, past all interference by a very concrete human selfishness.

He had seen Joan thus, many times; he delighted in the clear-headed acumen with which she would get at the rights of the matter, and the instantaneous decision with which she would range herself upon the side of right, no matter how forlorn a hope that side might be.

The girl’s vigorous mentality found little scope in the peaceful routine of her life here in Adairville, and Judge Adair realized the necessity for a wider field than books alone could give her; he knew the quality of her mind, and that it needed the friction of contact with other living minds and wills, to strike the flash of fire he so loved to see. He had made a companion of the girl — even in her madcap days, when she had been more like a happy, vigorous boy than a girl — and had talked life and men, politics and finance, to her as he would not have done to many men. He had included her always in all that interested himself and Hugh, tacitly assuming both her

interest and her comprehension in his work in the Courts. He and Watson had always accorded her her point of view upon every question, from the Federal Judiciary to the fluffy chickens upon the mountain farm. Under this system of training, which undoubtedly had its faults, Joan had developed an untrammeled mind and a mental poise unusual in a woman. She had what Watson called a "sort of man-sense" which she had acquired from constant companionship with himself and Judge Adair; they both loved her with an adoring affection, but they had not petted her even as a child, and had shrewdly made her fit herself and her feminine standards to the calm logic of their man-sense. She was as absolutely unspoiled as it is possible for a beautiful and spirited girl to be; natural, and frankly loving; and as frankly disconcerting to her women friends, whom she measured according to the scale of her father's calm judicial standards, and Hugh's shrewd insight into men.

Judge Adair thought now, with a smile, of what this fight between the city and Falls would afford her, and almost wished that he was not himself upon the same side, that he might the more fully enjoy her. To Falls himself, or to the possibility of any other interest than that which he had seen her show so many times coloring her partisanship, he gave not a thought.

He thought instead, sitting in the sunlight with the girl upon his knee, for the thousandth time, that if she had only been a boy, what a lawyer, what a statesman, he would have made of her!

"There is Hugh," the old man thought a little sadly; "yes, yes, Hugh is what I have made him — almost! The boy is a lawyer and a gentleman; but," with a

plaintive sigh, “he is so d——— humorous! I did not do that! That is the Watson strain, and the Watson strain may be deeper in him than I know; it may in time undo all that I have done; cross strains of blood may work the devil in a man! But a mind like Joan’s will work out like a mathematical problem clearly from cause to effect. There is but one uncertain quality in her—her sex!”

Yet, Judge Adair, shrewd jurist that he was, failed to take cognizance of the personal element in this new interest, as well as the woman’s imagination which thrilled and warmed behind Joan’s clear, strong brain, infusing her interest in Falls’s concerns with a dangerous human warmth. He forgot for the moment that this Joan, who should have been John but was not, was alive and thrilling to her fingers’ ends with a subtle response to those triple chords of youth and sex and self which Falls’s magnetic virility had swept into a soundless music; felt, not heard; hearkened to, not yet comprehended.

“Father,” she said as Judge Adair was leaving, “you knew that Mr. Falls had called here, twice?”

“I saw the cards. What is it, Joan? Are you about to consult me for the first time in your life, about one of your suitors?”

“No!” she laughed lightly. “I do not require the aid of the Federal Judiciary in such matters, thank you, father. When it comes to suitors, I prefer military discipline. And, father, there *are* no suitors nowadays! Men do not come to sue any more; they come to argue and browbeat, and lay down the law! What I mean is, Betty says Mr. Falls is a Republican—and that all Republicans believe in negro equality.”

"Humph, Betty seems to have inherited old Ben Arch-
er's politics! Betty was the president or secretary or
a director of one of those insolvent clubs or guilds that
Falls sent bills to, was she not?"

"Yes; and you think I might be nice to Mr. Falls,
negro equality and all?"

"That is a matter entirely within your own jurisdiction,
child! You may 'be nice' to any man on God's earth
whom your own good sense and good taste tell you is
worthy of that distinction. Your decision in such a
matter carries my endorsement with it, as a matter of
course. For the rest—why, Falls must look out for
himself when it comes to the exhibition of the 'nice-
ness'!"

Joan had not seen Falls to speak to him since the June
night six months before. An occasional bow on the street
and a gravely lifted hat in return had been all.

There had been all summer a slow stirring of dislike
to Falls which, originating in the business circles down-
town, had widened and widened until its outer edge had
touched even Joan's remote life. The oppressive heat had
kept women indoors, and society languished; it was too
early for "fall cotton" to start its annual ripple upon
the stagnant surface of both business and society; and
Falls, his attitude toward Adairville (which was defined
somewhat oddly, with a bitter reminiscence of the hardly
skinned-over wounds of Reconstruction times, as "op-
pressive"), his uncompromising business methods, and his
determination to thrust negro equality upon the town by
putting negroes upon the cars, were the accepted topics
of conversation. Upon vine-shaded porticos, where Adair-

ville’s four hundred spent the short hot evenings, women spoke with bated breath of Falls’s incendiary attempt to establish negro equality, hinting vague calumnies — women who had never heard his voice in their lives, and whose only knowledge of him was a glimpse of his tall figure in the street, or a careless glance from his grave eyes in passing. Men were grimly silent; but none the less society’s edict went forth. Adairville’s doors were forever closed, nay, hermetically sealed, to any man who believed in negro equality.

With the cooler weather, when society mounted its rather slow coach, the ripple, which had been a cat’s-paw of gossip, culminated in one great gust of indignant dismay.

Falls’s manager had sent in bills to the various guilds and church societies for lighting the churches and club-rooms and meeting-halls of all kinds; and as the bills were already months in arrears, payment was likely to wreck the bank-accounts of the various societies!

Indignation meetings were held daily at the different houses of the officials of the societies and guilds; frappé was served, and the members with great display of business promptitude resolved themselves into committees to “see this Mr. Falls — his name *was* Falls, was n’t it? — and just tell him, right out, what they thought of him and his ways of doing business! He did not know, certainly, what had always, *always* been the custom *here!* He was from the North — oh, dear, yes! Would n’t anybody know, by the way he acted! Why, who ev-er h-e-a-r-d of charging the churches, and sending bills to ladies!”

It was finally decided that Mrs. Eldridge-Jones, the senior president of all the societies and clubs, should, as a

committee of one, approach this Mr. Falls, and make, so to speak, a test case of her particular societies.

"I must say," confided Mrs. Eldridge-Jones to old Jerry, who had been her coachman before the war, and had known her in her days of pride when, as the wife of "the Senator," she had been one of the most distinguished women in "the Confederacy"; and later, when shorn of her grandeur, she had, with the shrewd sense which distinguished her, annexed with a hyphen Colonel Jones and his rubber-tired carriages—"I must say, I have lived in Adairville *all* my life, befo' the wah and during th' wah and since the wah, but this is the first time I *ever* was in this part of town! Can we get through, Jerry?"

"Lawd, Miss Liza, dere is de plain street! Coursen we kin git throu'."

"Well, drive to that door, and, no—you need not get down, he will come out when he sees who it is!"

But minute after minute passed, and the door opening into Falls's office had remained closed; neither did the planks show any signs of shriveling beneath the lady's scorching glances; for, as ill-luck directed, Falls sat in full view of Mrs. Eldridge-Jones, calmly dictating letters without a glance toward the waiting carriage; and worse, when at last, in answer to Jerry's knock, the door had been opened, Mrs. Eldridge-Jones had distinctly heard Falls's careless, "See what she wants, Cummings!"

"She!" Mrs. Eldridge-Jones! Miss Winter that was, and the belle of the Confederacy!

At last, furious but determined, her beautiful old hands with delicate, pointed fingers trembling with passion, she made Falls's stenographer understand that it was Falls himself, Falls in person, whom she demanded to see!

“Ask the lady to come in,” said he calmly; but Cummings’s dubious glance at the floor of the rough, temporary office and backward to the voluminous folds of the lady’s silken gown sent Falls lazily toward the door. He made the concession as he would have lifted a kitten across a mud-puddle to save its dainty paws.

Mrs. Eldridge-Jones had never encountered Falls since the night when she had seen him waltzing with Joan; to her obstinate prejudice he was the “electric light man,” as was the man who read her meter, and the man in blue overalls who put up wires in front of her house; and it was in his character as a workman that she intended to have her interview with Falls. She did not recognize the possibility of his having any other personality. True, she had heard that he associated with negroes — advocated negro supremacy, but for the moment that could go. She had rehearsed her speech as she came down, not without a certain malicious pleasure. Jack Adair might let his daughter dance with the offscourings of the North, but she, Mrs. Eldridge-Jones, was true to the old standards with her last drop of blood! This man should learn what was due to the women of the Southern Confederacy!

The speech had opened in conciliatory wise: “My good man, surely you are not going to charge the Ladies of the Confederacy — ” but even if her anger at what she deemed sheerest insolence in Falls had not swept all thought of condescension from her mind, Falls’s appearance and manner as he stood beside her carriage bareheaded, with patient courtesy, would have been sufficient to effect a change of policy. She was too shrewd a tactician not to understand perfectly that her attack as she had planned it would rebound from the armor of this man as a puerile

impertinence. Impertinence was a familiar weapon, but puerility gave her sturdy insolence pause. Not for sixty years had her arrogant eyes measured men and manners to fail now to recognize a caste which, if not her own — nothing short of the old Charlestonians, and the angels right next the throne were included within that sacred pale — was nevertheless unmistakable. With coldest courtesy she tendered Falls several notes, together with the bill his manager had sent in to her as president of half a dozen societies and clubs. Falls glanced with surprise toward them as the reason for her call broke dimly upon his mind.

"Do you wish," he inquired with gentle deference, which enraged her afresh, seeing as she did that the deference was accorded not to the erstwhile belle of the Confederacy, but to the old woman of seventy years who sat before him, "do you wish to pay a bill here?"

"Where else?" she replied with withering emphasis.

A smile just glimmered in Falls's eyes — she marked their beauty, and the glimmer — as, marveling at the temper sparkling in her vindictive glance, he made reply, "You have come — by mistake — to my private office."

"Ah? Just be so kind as to receipt these bills — in full — up to date —" vague fragments of business formulæ floating back to her.

Falls's smile deepened; he did not even glance toward the notes, though he duly admired the beautiful wrinkled hand so imperiously extended toward him; stooping, he gently withdrew the folds of her skirt and closed the carriage door.

"Take Mrs. — er — Jones to the up-town office; there will be some one there to wait on her," he said quietly

to the coachman, and with a bow left her, speechless, in her carriage.

Mrs. Eldridge-Jones leaned back in her cushions, her eyes, still strong and bright amid the puckered folds of their once languishing lids, stern with resolve, and bright with the angry activity of the brain behind them.

Against the man in the blue overalls she would have been unarmed and helpless; but against this man who had just put her in her place with gentle ease, and had kept her there — nay, had dismissed her — against this man, then, there was a shining weapon within the armory of her mind whose use she understood to the degree of perfection. Social ostracism could be made to mean all to this man that his bitterest enemy would have it mean; the level glance of cold avoidance, which does not accuse but shrinks from its victim; the blighting whisper, disseminated like the breath of the upas in the air, before which a man’s reputation languishes and dies; the subtle innuendo settling like dry-rot upon the mind of the innocent and trusting — how well she understood it all!

Weaving her web backward, she wove into it Falls’s face as she had seen it while he waltzed with Joan — Joan’s as she lifted her smiling eyes to his. She had been a beautiful woman for forty years, and by the light of that past she read him without trouble.

“He would never stoop to sue for explanations; his sort never do! He will eat his heart out with longing, but he would not bend that high head an inch to Joan, nor to Jack Adair, if I know aught of men —” She laughed suddenly, with angry humor. “Drive home, Jerry; I’m able to give my own orders yet awhile — in spite of Mr. Gregory Falls, of New York!”

She was too clever a tactician to risk delay; before the advent of "fall cotton" the crop of dragons' teeth had sprung full-armed to life. That word of dread which had echoed in the ears of the South during the unquiet times of the Reconstruction lifted its head again: "Equality of the races, negro supremacy," the banshee of the Southern press, the lash of the Southern demagogue!

Joan took silent issue with the town; her generous heart and untrammeled mind ranged themselves silently upon Falls's side. Again and again had she been tempted to throw the weight of her own popularity, backed by the ægis of her father's name, into the scale on Falls's side; but always what Watson called her "man-sense" had restrained her — the thought of what Falls himself might think of her championship. He had given her no right to think he valued her partisanship; had not called again after these first times; had given no sign of interest except that his dark eyes sought her own when they met, with frank pleasure.

The power-house lay just beyond the hill upon which Judge Adair's house was built, and Joan often saw Falls on his way back and forth. It was a long, hard walk to town over the hills, but, as Falls told himself with grave mendacity, he needed exercise — he hated a crowded, stuffy car!

Joan saw him now as she was resuming operations upon the winter garden, after her father had left her.

Her glow of indignation still lingered and, it may be, tipped her usually level judgment; but be that as it may, it is certain that, as Falls came opposite to her across the privet hedge, Joan looked up from her low seat upon the grassy border and spoke to him, her voice carrying easily

in the quiet air across the lawn, vibrating with a warm, personal note, and her eyes met his full of friendliness across the hedge of stiff waxy foliage.

Falls paused a moment involuntarily, as he lifted his hat, and after another instant of grim counsel with himself opened the gate and crossed the space between them.

“Is n’t it late for gardening?” he asked, taking in his firm clasp the hand she reached him from her low seat. He retained it a moment as she rose, lifting her strongly to her feet. The clinging warmth of the girl’s hand stole through his frame like wine.

“I am not really gardening,” she answered. “I am only putting out some more chrysanthemums, and thinning the violets to make them bloom.”

She stood before him in her simple home gown, like the incarnate spirit of the warm, crisp winter day. The sun on her bare head turned the love-locks on her brow to gold, and Falls noted that her eyes were precisely the color of the purple-gray mist lying in the sunlighted valleys.

To her surprise, he seemed interested when she spoke of the violets, and asked, looking keenly about among the taller shrubs, where the violets were; adding that he had never seen them.

“Have you never seen a violet?” echoed she, with so sorrowful a dismay that Falls, laughing, had to admit that he had seen them in flower-stalls.

“In bunches, you know; but certainly not growing out like this—in December!”

He stooped beside her and parted the dew-drenched leaves as she gathered a dozen long-stemmed, sturdy blooms of the kind found in sunny banks in old gardens,

which here lined every winding walk and carpeted the hedgerows.

He divined that they were for him, and had a quick vision of her little wet, rather muddy hands fumbling at his buttonhole — of that dainty presence close beside him.

But no; young as Joan seemed beside Falls's strong maturity, she was a past master in a school whose portals he had yet to cross. She shook the wet, clinging blooms serenely upon the sheets of the *Adairville Daily Enterprise*, spread tablewise upon the flat-topped box row bordering the walks, and bent to gather them in a bunch with the ones which Falls added from time to time.

Falls came to her aid finally, his expert fingers performing the light task with a dexterity which made his bunch grow apace. As the rival bunches grew the contest for the few remaining blossoms grew warm, and Falls found himself grasping the stem of a violet whose head was firmly locked and twisted into that of another held with equal tenacity by Miss Adair. He looked up with a smile to find, to his amazement, the stern joy of combat painted upon her face.

"We 'll fight them!" she cried joyously; "who is yours?"

"Fight them?" echoed Falls.

"Violets always fight when they are thrown into a pile like this; and it is always a duel to the death; no quarter asked or given!"

"We must name them?"

"Yes; who will yours be?"

Falls thought for a moment. "The Adairville Power and Passenger Company," he said grimly.

“But that is my side too,” expostulated Joan; “I could only put up a sham fight!”

Falls bent eagerly toward her, his somber eyes alight. “On the company’s side? On *my* side?”

For the moment the fight was off. “You will never know, I could not tell you if I might, how I prize your friendship, Miss Adair,” Falls said earnestly.

And Joan, ruthlessly incriminating Judge Adair, replied: “Father and I were just speaking of it; we think, we *both* think, all this,” with a vague wave toward the brazen headlines of the newspaper, “is such a perfect shame!”

“In that case,” smiled Falls, “in that very delightful case, these belligerents had better be parted,” and he gently essayed to separate the little locked heads, which resisted firmly.

“They cannot be,” said Joan gravely; “once they are locked like that they will behead themselves before they will give in.”

“Shall we, then, just in a spirit of prophecy, fight it out?”

“Yes; and I will be — who shall I be?” lifting eyes of gravest counsel to Falls’s own.

“Whoever is behind that rot, there; Adairville, I suppose.”

“Yes,” she gently acquiesced, “Adairville.”

The fight was on. The arena, strewn with violets instead of sand, rocked with the combat. The smooth stems glided back and forth, darting like tongues of purple flame, clutching and twisting in sinuous curves, striving each to bend the other back, back until the slender neck, bent at too sharp an angle to the stem, should snap off.

Joan's fingers were agile with long practice in this mode of warfare, and she shortly had Falls at her mercy, though his superior strength and suppleness of wrist had told heavily against her; but she pressed him hard, and finally, at the end of a fierce sortie, with a skilful upward jerk, her violet clinched his antagonist in a death-grip, there was a silent moment of grim struggle—during which Joan's breath came short, and the tip of a rose-leaf tongue showed between her parted lips in tense excitement—and it was over, leaving in Falls's hand the mutilated stalk! He stooped for the little slaughtered head, and, holding it in his broad palm, looked unsmilingly down upon it.

"So?" he said gently. "I am to be worsted, am I?"

Joan, too, was oddly serious over the bit of fun. She cast the little conqueror back to obscurity, and, gathering up the bunch, offered them all to Falls.

"See," she said gravely, "he is yours with all his honors on his head!"

"Which is he?" asked Falls, searching the little faces as though for a familiar one.

"This, I th-i-nk," said Joan; laying a slender fore-finger beneath her warrior's head, she raised his drooping face to Falls, who, suddenly stooping, kissed the little warrior—and the slim finger-tip.

"I surrender," he said, "to my conqueror."

He lingered at the gate, admiring the beautiful old house, with its great fan-shaped lawns bordered with box as green as it had been in June. The December sun shone warm, bringing out the racy odors of the box; the blue jays, their dispute settled at last, now shouted a brazen jubilate from the silver poplars which crowded to the

borders of the lawn like “woodland beggars clad in silver rags,” shivering in the spicy air.

As she talked to him idly and brightly, meeting frankly the controlled eagerness of his glance, Joan was arguing within herself strenuously a question of social etiquette. Should she or not ask Falls to call? Her father had said she could be nice to him; did nice imply as much as a call? She knew that, uninvited, Falls would not repeat his call; she knew why he would not do so.

As he lingered, letting Joan see frankly his pleasure in the chance encounter, her ear caught the note of wistfulness which his polished reticence before the world so rigidly concealed, so arrogantly denied. And she thought with a rush of indignant pity of all she had heard of his life in Adairville; of the wall of silent antagonism which shut him out from the genial warmth of the social atmosphere; of the purposeful isolation meted out to him. She wondered anew how much it meant to him. He was so strong, so capable, so self-sufficing.

Joan was herself thoroughly a part of the social life of Adairville; she was bound by a million ties of association to the town and its people—ties as impalpable as ether and as closely encompassing. For generations her place here had been kept warm for her by some Grandmother Adair, or Grandmother Courtney, who had been a part of the gay, stately life of the old régime, as she was to-day of the easy, cordial life about her. Ostracism from this life meant more, naturally, to her than it could possibly mean to Falls, indifferent, as she told herself, alike to the town, its people, its customs, its society.

But a moment later, when he left her, the invitation had been shyly proffered, and, after a second of silent musing, accepted frankly; and Falls had gone his way with the violets in his coat-pocket, as Joan noted with a silent stare of consternation, which melted into laughter as she saw him, a moment later, draw his pipe from the same pocket!

V

THIS THING YOU CALL COMPLEXION GOES TO THE BONE

"FALLS," said Watson, pushing a pile of papers across to him, "have you a first name? If such an old Spartan would acknowledge to the soft impeachment of a Christian name!"

"No," answered Falls lazily; "or if I have I have mislaid it. I never need it."

"What do women call you?"

"Mr. Falls," as a rule."

"What does the exception call you?"

"The exception," with a quick smile, "if there was one, would have no occasion to call me. I'd be right there all the time!"

"Sign these papers while you are here; no need to read them. My clients are not allowed to read papers. Ah, ha, 'Gregory'! I might have known it. Like a mouthful of iron filings!"

"I think it is rather an improvement on 'Challie,'" grinned Falls behind the short pipe he was smoking.

"Who the devil — Joan, of course! I've told her a thousand times . . . My middle name is Chalmers. These papers, Falls, these, you see? These go to Hallett; you had better take them to him yourself and go over them with him."

There had come into Hugh's genial voice the hardening that of late the mention of Hallett's name always brought there.

"Sure," said Falls, "I 'll take them now."

"You 're not going, Falls?"

"No; I rather wanted to talk, if you 're not busy?"

"Not at all! I 'd let most anything go by me, in favor of such an unprecedented occasion as your 'wanting to talk.'"

Falls sat at his ease in the big swivel-chair, his knee propped against the desk; he smoked in silence for a minute, and when he spoke at last there was a restrained coldness in his voice, which in a man less grave and with less poise would have been diffidence.

"It 's about this infernal matter here; these negroes. Have you heard?"

Watson turned his stolid face with eyes of keen amusement upon his companion.

"Where do you suppose I 've been, man — wandering upon India's coral strand?" He laughed a little, bluntly. "Have n't you seen the morning papers, Falls?" He was reaching a long arm for them, when Falls stopped him with a curt gesture of the pipe he held in his palm.

"I never read them," he said briefly; "tell it me — if it is necessary that I should know."

"It is hardly that—" said Hugh. "It is only that blatant fool, Montgomery. He has a column of rot about the negro motormen. He thinks — or he thinks he thinks; he has nothing to think with, you know; it 's only ganglionic action; he has no brains; he does his thinking with his spinal cord, like the rhizopods and the other creepers! Well, anyhow, his spinal cord is of the opinion

that you have endangered the ‘Caucasian supremacy of the White Hosts of the American continent’ by your ‘incendiary action in crossing the color-line.’ Alec’s strong on the color-line! He makes copy of it whenever he is short of locals.”

Falls had wheeled about to face Watson, his somber eyes aglow with wrath, but Hugh was carefully building a pyramid of the small furniture of the desk, and he did not meet the other’s angry eyes.

“How the devil have I crossed any color-line?” demanded Falls.

“Put niggers on the cars as motormen to run ’em for white people,” said Watson quietly.

“There are as many negro passengers, almost, as white —”

“That’s aside from the point; if there were more it would still be aside from the point!” Watson threw himself back in his chair, meeting the other man’s eyes with a keen glance, absolutely grave and compelling. “Before we go any further, Falls, I want to ask you a question — rather a brutal one, but necessary: Was this thing — this putting those fool niggers in uniform and putting ’em on the cars — done in retaliation, or was it a blunder?”

Falls’s grave eyes met his own in frank surprise.

“Retaliation? Upon whom? For what?”

“I knew it!” cried Watson. “I knew Joan was right!”

“‘Joan’?” echoed Falls, a streak of red showing in his dark cheek. “What was Miss Adair right about? You’re very enigmatical, Watson! I’m all in the dark —”

"Joan wrote me—she was writing about another matter," lied Hugh, not just certain as to how Joan would take his breach of confidence—"and she mentioned this trouble here. She called it a mistake. She did not believe it retaliation; nor did I!"

"Retaliation—oh! So the town thinks I put the niggers on for spite! What blasted rot! As a matter of fact, Hugh, I put them on because they were all I could get. But, do you know, Watson," Falls went on, "I rather fancy the beggars! They're quick to learn, and—er—pleasant to have about," vaguely, "good strong chaps in case of an accident. And what the deuce does it matter what color they are? It's the first time in my life I ever heard of a man's complexion cutting any figure when it came to taking a car along a track!"

"This is n't a question of complexion; it goes to the bone!" said Watson, staring past Falls with a hard gaze. "Where did you tell me you were born, Falls?"

"Westover, Massachusetts."

"And raised there?"

"Thereabouts, and in England. My father used to take me with him rather than leave me, a lonely little shaver, in America. He'd put me in school for a term while he went about, and then we'd come back."

Watson roused himself. "That explains it," he said slowly. "You simply do not understand this thing that you call 'complexion.' Race antagonism is like certain dangerous chemicals; innocuous so long as they are undisturbed, but under friction—force, they become explosives."

"I do understand!" cried Falls hotly. "No man living is keener for racial purity than I, no matter where it

may exist! But I confess I do not understand the manifestation of racial prejudice as it is exhibited here in Adairville—no, no! I shall not run amuck of local institutions! But I want to thrash this out for once and all! We 'll leave out, if you like, the question of domestic service—though the South strains at a gnat and swallows a camel, in that! Still, let us leave out the 'black mammies,' and the old-time 'body-servants,' and the thousand capacities in which the negro is to-day woven into the social fabric of the South, and there yet remains the business relation. White people buy and sell side by side with negroes in shops, serve them at counters, ride in the same cars with them, are served by them in all sorts of governmental positions—”

Watson raised his hand impressively.

“ You lack the point of view, Falls; they do these things upon a recognized lower plane, the plane of an inferior race. The *motif* of the South's attitude toward the descendants of the old slave race is; that the negro race is not only the inferior, but the subordinate, race. Anything which tends to tip the balance the other way—! That is where the shoe pinches Adairville in the matter of the negro motormen; they had a semblance of equality in the position you give them!”

“ Bosh!” cried Falls, but his stern lips curved into a smile. “ Since you think it best, Hugh, I 'll let the beggars go. I 'll have men here on that midnight train.”

“ I think it is expedient; I don't go any further than that, Falls.”

Falls had risen to go, but he paused, stood silent a moment, then abruptly: “ Watson, what did you say Miss Adair said about this matter?”

Hugh drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket and without looking at Falls, who paused alertly by his side, deftly sifted them.

"Here," he selected a small gray envelope and tossed it to Falls.

"May I? Thanks."

A dozen hasty lines were inscribed within in Joan's bold, even writing.

"DEAR HUGH:— You had better come home and look after Mr. Falls. He does not understand things here in the least. I inclose Alec Montgomery's article from the morning paper. He is a cad — father says so, too!

"Mr. Falls is simply making a mistake — any one can see that; but in view of this other talk about negro equality — so hateful of them! Still, it is unfortunate.

"Let Mr. Bellew's case go; he has plenty of money, anyhow, and come back at once and look after Mr. Falls.

"Of course, Will-Henry must go; but I cannot well discuss it with Mr. Falls, even if he gave me the chance, and he does not. But, as he has nobody but us two, you must come.

"Lovingly, JOAN ADAIR."

In one corner of the sheet was scribbled a small ellipse. When Falls reached it the eyes of the two men met with a smile.

"Joan has not kissed me since she put on long dresses, you know; but she always adds a kiss like that at the end of her letters."

"You enjoy some very enviable perquisites, Hugh," said Falls as he tendered the note rather wistfully to Watson. "Just what relation are you of the Adairs?"

Hugh waved it back. "You may have it. No relation," he went on, his heavy face softening. "It 's heart-kin,

you know. Oh, well — yes, there is a fiction: Judge Adair's first wife — Mollie Calhoun — was my step-mother's sister; you can work out the consanguinity at your leisure."

Falls had thrust the little letter into his inside pocket; his grave eyes as he looked down upon Watson were a trifle warmer than they were wont to be. "I cannot tell you, Hugh, how much I value this proof of Miss Adair's interest in a stranger. Barring your own, it is, I think, the first bit of thoughtful kindness that I have received since I came to live in Alabama."

There was no resentment in his tone, a quiet statement of a fact, that was all; and Hugh found himself wondering, as Joan had done, how much Falls knew of the feeling toward him in the town, and how far he cared.

"Miss Adair mentioned negro equality; what did she mean?" asked Falls, his eyes narrowing sternly.

Watson evaded the issue, cleverly: "Do you go into politics at all, Falls?"

"Very slightly; have politics to do with her note?"

"It touches it at one point, yes. As a Republican, you know, Falls, you are up against one of the holiest tenets in the Democratic creed!"

"How does it read, this creed?"

"Ah, well," murmured Hugh complacently, "I don't mind doing a little proselyting now and then, for the political 'Lost Cause'!"

He joined his scholarly white hands behind his head and, lying back in his chair, recited with solemn fervor: "I believe in one Thomas Jefferson, the Maker and Giver of Democracy; and in all things visible and invisible which tend to the maintenance of his stultifying policies

and principles. I believe in the supremacy of the Caucasian race, and in the divine right of the Democratic party to disfranchise the negro. I believe that all Republicans desire to establish the equality of the races. I look for the resurrection of Democracy and the rescinding of the fifteenth amendment. Amen."

Falls grinned his appreciation of Hugh's cynicism with a flash of white teeth that lighted up his grave face with sudden boyishness. "When your Democratic constituency gets ready to hang you, Hugh, out there in the court-house yard, I 'll be on hand to cut you down!"

He laughed as he ran down the steps to the street on his way to Hallett's office.

VI

"IS HE NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER?"

H ALLETT was not in his offices when Falls reached them, and he put the papers into his pocket with a scornful glance about Hallett's too luxurious quarters.

As he emerged from Hallett's doorway he saw his car in the distance and crossed the street to await it. He noted indifferently that some event of more than usual interest appeared to be animating the streets.

"A circus," Falls muttered, "or a baptizing!" Yet it struck him at the moment that the aspect of the crowd which filled the streets differentiated it from any which he had yet seen; the groups about the corners and crowding the pavement in front of the hotel were for the most part silent, expectant; men constantly arrived from deserted shops and offices, joined the shifting stream, asked a question, squared themselves toward the open street, and took on the expectant attitude of the others.

"What the devil are they at?" Falls wondered curiously, but his car was close upon him and he turned to meet it, and as he did so perceived that it bore the colored motorman, Will-Henry, whose selection for the post had raised the temperature of the town to boiling point.

Something — it may have been the bracing winter air, or the stiff folds of the little note which Falls could feel

with every breath he drew, against his bosom — something had raised Falls's spirits; the worried line his brow had worn for days had disappeared; and for the first time he was inclined to see the undoubted humor of the situation, resulting from his innocent blunder, and the commotion it had caused in the town.

He noted with keen amusement the air of importance with which the negro was bringing the car along the track, with a glance to right and left, whose childlike fatuousness seemed to claim the earth as a stage for the exhibition of his supreme importance.

Will-Henry was a slight, well-made negro of thirty-five, perhaps; a tan-colored mulatto, with the suavely ingratiating manners of his type. He had been a porter at the hotel where Falls lived, and was very much of a favorite with every one about the place.

He had approached Falls soon after he arrived at the hotel with a wide grin of friendliness and the genial inquiry, "Doan't you want me fur yo' nigger, Mist'r Falls?"

"I don't need a valet, thank you, Will," Falls had told him.

Nothing daunted by Falls's refusal, Will-Henry had serenely assumed charge of him, jealously guarding him from the approach of any other aspirant for the position which he had decided to fill; and, as time passed, he became, without dispute or comment, "Mist'r Falls's nigger."

Falls looked at him, now, with a pleasant smile of liking as the car came down the wind. Will-Henry stood haughtily erect, his new uniform very fresh and natty, his cap set jauntily upon one side, gratified vanity radiating

from every pore of his vacant, good-natured face. Some one hailed him upon the corner above Falls, and he brought the car up with as much of a swagger as it could be made to yield!

Several men boarded the car at the rear; there was laughing, and shoving, then a sudden commotion that caused Falls to raise his head alertly, but he was a block away, and the negro made no sign; he did not even turn his head toward his unruly passengers, but gave his attention to his work. Falls saw him as he loosed the lever, and at the same instant a dozen men stepped upon the platform and snatched the bar from his hand. With a sudden premonition of what it meant Falls started toward the car with long strides. But he saw he would be too late. A dozen hands grasped the struggling negro and bore him backward into the car. Falls caught a confused vision of struggling forms, of tossing arms, of men's heads and hats. There was a roar of cheers and laughter from the packed sidewalks, as Will-Henry's form, in the jaunty uniform, shot from the rear of the car and struck the ground a dozen yards away, rolling over and over amid the loose gravel and sand of the road-bed.

The car had been brought to a stand upon the crest of a steep incline, and under the impetus of the sling which had sent the negro off, as well as the rush of the men who left it in a scramble for the pavements, it moved gently forward, gaining headway every second as it advanced toward Falls.

It took him a few seconds to reverse it, and as the terrified negro, now upon his feet mopping the dirt from his face, which was cut and bleeding, saw the car move slowly in his direction, he gave one scream of terror, and,

snatching his cap from his head, ran for his life, straight up the track! He was followed by a continuous roar of laughter, by cheers, hooting, and whistling from the crowded streets, that seemed to lend wings to his heels as he fled blindly up the steep hill, straining to outrun the car which Falls was taking slowly up the track almost at the frightened creature's heels, calling to him to stop.

In vain! Will-Henry sped on, panting, desperate, until with an inspiration of insane terror he doubled madly back, slipped upon the rail, and went down almost under the wheels.

Falls stopped the car short, leaped down, and, dragging him to his feet, shook him, as a terrier would shake a rat, in keen exasperation.

"You blasted idiot! I came within an ace of killing you. Get back on your car!"

But Will-Henry was past getting back, past doing anything but to grovel amid the sand and gravel at Falls's feet, a pitiful, abject creature.

"Gawd A'mighty, Mist'r Falls," he gasped in the extremity of his terror, "lem'me go, sah! Doan't put me back on that ar car no mo', sah! I 'd ur sight ruther black boots. I — I 'll run arrands! I 'll do anything, ruther 'n be hung up by ur mob!"

He cringed under Falls's hand like a beaten hound, and Falls shook him again fiercely.

"Get back! You 're going to run this car through those cursed ruffians if I have to kill you to make you do it!"

"Lem'me go!" he wailed. "I ain't nuthen but ur nigger —"

"You are," said Falls in grim disgust, "you are the damnedest coward I ever saw! Get back on the car!"

He thrust him upon the platform, and, still grasping him firmly, took him through the car and bade him take hold.

"Gawd, Mist'r Falls, dey 'll hang me shore 's I 'm bawnded!" he almost wept; but Falls was relentless.

"I 'll shake the life out of you if you don't stand up there and run this car as I tell you! You infernal cur!"

Falls was standing beside the trembling negro, who had scarcely strength to handle the lever, as the car came smoothly on down the steep hill toward the corner where the silent throngs packed the street from the buildings to the tracks on either side. Not a sound broke the silence but the rumble of the car; there were no cheers, no laughter; a grim malignity of hate held the spectators rigid, with hostile eyes on Falls and the miserable Will-Henry, who fairly swooned as he stood.

Falls was smoking. His soft hat, thrust back in his struggle with the negro, showed his grave face to the crowds which pressed upon the tracks, almost brushing the wheels; his eyes were narrowed against the smoke of his cigar which the motion of the car blew backward, and not a line of his cold face altered as he faced the ominous quiet of that waiting mob.

The car reached the crossing where it had been stopped before, and a gentleman stepped quietly from the crowd and raised his hand to hail it as coolly as if the street had been empty. Falls slowed the car down, and Watson stepped on board, with his customary stumble. He came on through the car to the forward platform, and stand-

ing behind Falls — between him and the street — put his long arm about his shoulders, looking into his eyes with his own full of laughter and quizzical admiration.

“ You old sand-pump ! ” he murmured.

Falls answered the pressure of his arm upon his shoulder with a smile of fine irony, but he did not speak, and neither he nor Hugh turned a glance upon the menacing crowds, whose hostile eyes were fixed upon Watson in thwarted anger, as the car rolled on unmolested. It made the return trip still carrying the three, Falls grimly silent, Watson’s arm still about his neck, and the abject Will-Henry clinging to the handle-bar. The streets slowly emptied of the throngs of spectators, and presently Falls got off the car at his office.

“ I think,” said Falls, quietly, “ I think I will let Pope go, he is not much good, and keep Will-Henry on for a spell.”

“ Aye,” said Watson, grimly; “ but if you keep Will-Henry you ’ll have to chain him to the platform ! Do you know that cane-brake out Lintonia way, Falls ? Well, send out there for your car in an hour or two ; that ’s where Will-Henry will jump her ! Billy is a cane-brake nigger ; he ’ll take to the sticks like a duck to water when he ’s scared — won’t you, Will-Henry ? ”

“ Naw, sah ! ”

“ You liar,” said Watson, pleasantly, and from the wreck of his prideful post of one short hour ago, Will-Henry fished up a melancholy grin.

As Falls was crossing the court-house yard he encountered Hallett, and, remembering the papers, turned with him to a seat under the big water-oak in the center

of the square. As they neared the tree some one glided around it and away.

"Are we driving some one off?" asked Falls, hesitating.

"It was only a colored girl, and she has gone."

"It seems to me, Hallett," said Falls, "that your local color is not so deep as you would have us believe; I notice that you never say 'nigger' like the other natives!"

"There was no occasion to say it here," replied Hallett, with rather more of a rasp in his even tones than Falls had expected to bring there; "that was not a — a negro; that was Rosebud, — Miss Archer's Rosebud."

"This Rosebud," said Falls, meditatively, — "I suppose there is a parent bush somewhere to have produced so sturdy a blossom? — Since special creations are out of date?"

"The bush that produced that rosebud has its roots in some of the best soil in Dixie, or I am much mistaken! But it would be dangerous work to go grubbing for them."

"I have not much turn for grubbing," said Falls, carelessly, "and I learned long ago that, by the time you get down to the roots, men are alike the world over."

"Aye—" assented Hallett, cynically, and the subject dropped. The papers were taken up, gone into, disposed of, and Falls was in the act of tying the packet when Hallett stooped and, picking a paper from the grass, silently proffered it to Falls, who mechanically included it in the packet on his knee. He slipped the tape under the packet without disturbing its compact form, and was drawing it taut, when the paper which Hallett had placed upon the top arrested his attention; though

it agreed in shape, it had not the appearance of a legal paper, nor was it endorsed, the only writing showing upon the outside being a line of writing parallel with the fold.

He bent closer, still holding the tape taut, and read in the same clear, small writing in which the papers were endorsed, the two words, "Your father," written as the signature of a letter is written.

"What is that?" asked Hallett, and without waiting for a reply plucked it nimbly from the packet and opened it.

"Where did this come from?" he asked carelessly.

"You handed it to me by mistake; it seems to be one of your private papers."

In the midst of his absorption Hallett found time to glance aside at his companion with incredulous scorn.

"Nixie—my private papers!" he retorted briefly; "when you catch one lying about let me know, will you?"

"Sure," said Falls, calmly, returning to his own packet, "that is what I should naturally do!"

He was still busy with the papers on his knee when something, some inexplicable change in Hallett, arrested him. It was like the sudden stiffening of a game dog when he scents a covey. He did not speak or move, but he grew rigid as he sat, and the paper in his hand slightly rustled.

Falls's strong eyes saw that it was covered with the same small, clear writing set close together in a way he seemed to know, the lines short, leaving a wide margin on the page.

A sudden qualm passed through him. Whose writing was this? What hidden meaning was there in this simple

sheet, which had dashed the clear red from Hallett's handsome face?

Leaning forward in his seat, Falls read with Hallett in the fast waning light, in Watson's unmistakable writing, what seemed to be a letter.

"**MY CHILD:**— You will find herein instructions for your journey, with a list of your probable expenses, together with such advice, as to your future, as I am able to offer.

"I have made every arrangement to ensure your safety and comfort; I do not say happiness, for that lies not in my power, Rosebud, and it may be not in your own. But I have met every condition which in my judgment will lead to contentment for you in the present. I believe you to be a good girl, in spite of this folly for which I am sending you away from this place. There will come a day, quickly too, when you will see that, in putting you beyond the temptations of your present associations, I am saving you from a fate of which you can have no conception.

"In this new life which I have mapped out for you, you will find contentment and independence. I wish you to remember that I recognize your claim upon me in the present and in the future, as in the past; my part of our agreement will be kept to the letter, and I shall expect you on your part to meet the conditions fully. I repeat them here to impress them more firmly upon you; remember, Rosebud, what they are!

"You will never return south of the Ohio River without my permission; you will never seek to communicate with me or any member of my family, *and you will hold no communication with this man whose name I need not mention*, neither in Adairville nor at any other place. All is now said that needs to be said between us. May God bless you, and show me further and always my duty to you.

"YOUR FATHER."

Falls leaned back in the corner of the bench; it was quite dark in the shadow of the tree, but outside the light still lingered. Neither he nor Hallett spoke. The gloom hid Hallett's face from Falls. It was black with sullen rage, the lower lip held between his teeth in savage tension.

Falls lighted a cigar with mechanical precision, watching the flame creep up the stump until it reached his fingers. He did not look at Hallett, but pointed across the square to where a girl's light figure flitted hither and thither, with uncertain movement, as of one who seeks for some object upon the ground.

"She is coming for her letter," he said.

Hallett started up. "I will take it to her," he said, and, rising, went toward Rosebud. Falls saw him meet her, linger a moment in talk, and pass on. Rosebud hurried away, but Falls sat on and on, in the darkening square.

An hour had passed ere he roused himself as from a sleep, and he must have been asleep and dreaming; for a tiny piccaninny, stealing near to get the cigar Hallett had left upon the seat, started back and stood trembling while the big white man stretched himself and said out loud:

"God! Our pleasant vices! What whips they are to scourge us!"

The piccaninny waited for no more, but incontinently fled. The white man's talk in his sleep bore a suspicious resemblance to mammy's waking accents. True, she called it "whup"—but the piccaninny knew!

VII

IN THE PRIMROSE PATH

A NIGHT or two after the street-car episode, Falls found himself facing the keen cold of the winter evening, on the long walk to Judge Adair's house on the hilltop. As he swung strongly along, his teeth hard on his cigar, his eyes narrowed against the biting wind, a smile that was half-tender, half-ironical, quivered on his lips.

He was thinking out this new situation, as he walked, — it was time to do so, he had decided, — and he took it up, as he would have taken up any other problem of life or business, sanely and bravely.

Falls's life had always been a busy one, full to overflowing of work, of strenuous enterprise; he had breathed always the stimulating ozone of action. There had never been a time since his boyhood, when to pause, to dally, to smile upon a face no matter how fair, but would have meant to loosen, in a measure, his close, wrestler's grip on life. Yet, with that grip unrelaxed, with his muscles taut in the fight, he had found time to dream of the primrose path of love. He realized now, as he swung along through the frosted brilliance of the winter night, that the turning in the path had been made.

"I 'm done with pretense," he told himself. "I 'm

done playing the churl and the coward! I love Joan — love her! And if the ghost of every rebel that fell in that insane struggle should rise from where he sleeps to keep her from me, I should fight my way naked-handed to her, and make her tell me with her own lips that she does not love me, or that she does!" And a warm, virile gladness filled Falls that his love had come to him in his strong maturity and not in his callow youth.

The world knew Falls as cold, self-contained, and he had acquiesced in its verdict, carelessly; but he could have laughed aloud at the swift breaking up of those polar snows about his heart before the warm flood which was pouring through every fiber of his being.

He was not thinking definitely of Joan, as every step bore him toward her; he was adjusting himself to the wonderful phase through which he was passing; was getting his bearings, thinking out the situation in its varied aspects. He was conscious of Joan only as the spark which had made vital this whole exquisite scheme of things. Heretofore, when he had thought of her, it had been in detail: of her rough, bright hair against the cream of her throat; of the curve of her frank mouth; the warm, magnetic glance of her gray eyes; the rise and fall of her soft bosom. And she had interpreted woman to him. Now she spelled life and love; she was the definition of his present, the index to his future.

He roused himself resolutely, after a moment of this yielding, and took up with his clear reasonableness the question of his love, his hope of winning Joan, from the aspect of his relationship to the town — his position and prospects there; which meant to him, in this new possibility, so much more than it had ever meant before.

"Confound Adairville!" he said by way of preamble, and bent his mind to the solution of the problem which had taxed Hallett's politic astuteness to elucidate to the stockholders of the old Power and Passenger Company.

For weeks Falls had been conscious of a change about him. For weeks he had been groping his way through the familiar routine of his life amid a chilling mist, which faded before reason and common sense only to close upon him from another side. In the club, at his hotel, upon the streets, in his own yards and barns and among his employees, this impalpable thing was between him and others; it chilled men's glances in the act of meeting his; it lay upon casual faces like a scowl; it spoke in voices which uttered civil words; it showed itself in the lurch of slow-moving workmen who dared not disobey.

From her note to Watson he perceived that Joan had full knowledge, which she shared with Hugh, of this elusive something which he, himself, could not grasp in his relation to the town. The very writing of the note, as Falls saw it now, implied a knowledge of something regarding him of which he himself knew nothing.

Since the finding of Rosebud's letter, which had cast so black a shadow upon Hugh's own past, Falls had avoided even the slightest allusion to the absurd charge referred to in Joan's note as to negro equality; but he had brooded over it with amazed indignation that was not without its note of grim humor.

"Negro equality — the devil!" he mused. "What name, if it may please them, do they give their own — affiliations? Pah!"

The second clue had been given him by the attitude of the men whom he met in business, and socially, at the

club and hotel. Falls was conscious, after the street-car incident, that these men watched him, the gentlemen covertly, the rougher men openly, for some sign; and when the cold serenity of his usual manner failed to betray even his consciousness of their scrutiny, the passive coldness of the gentlemen took on a cutting edge of rancor, and the elaborate, ostentatious avoidance of him grew daily more and more personal.

In this long, starlit walk in the keen open air, Falls was, for the first time, deliberately threshing this thing out to its ultimate conclusion. He threw up his head, as he walked, in an indignant protest against the whole affair, the puzzling uncertainty, the injustice—and then stopped short in the dark path with a laugh of grim helplessness.

"Let us go over the counts in the indictment and see if I can grasp the thing from their own point of view. Well, then, first, I am a Yankee; guilty on that count. And so is Hallett, but never mind. Second, I am a Republican; guilty on that count, also. I believe in negro equality? Not guilty, and not a shred of proof to sustain them. It is preposterous—damnable! I live an open life here—no man in the place is more in evidence. That, then, is an absurdity; it is more, it is a stalking-horse for something else. What? That's the crux of the whole. For heaven's sake, what are they driving at?"

He paused by the gate at Hillcrest, looking blankly off into the night.

"Does Hugh know? Does Joan?"

As he turned from that long gaze across the valley, and clicked the gate to behind him, Joan stood at his elbow.

"How do you do, Mr. Falls?" she said with the same

warm note of comradeship, the same bewitching mantle of delicious matter-of-factness about her that she had worn when Falls had met her first.

"I came down with father—and then I waited for you. Father decided at the last minute to go to his office, where he can have his stenographer. Come in to the fire!"

She offered him a chill little hand and turned toward the house. Falls drew the hand she had given him silently to his arm, and together they walked toward the house, their steps ringing sharply upon the hard, packed sand of the walks.

"Which one of your gods were you invoking, Mr. Falls, in that trancelike gaze across the valley?" asked Joan, lightly.

Falls started. "It was a goddess," he said simply.

Joan broke into a delicious laugh. "You did well to invoke her *outside* of the gate! I do not allow any stray goddesses trespassing upon *my* preserves; I am an unscrupulous monopolist!"

It was a charming room into which she ushered him; and to Falls, who had never known a home even of the simplest, inexpressibly charming. Joan led him about, telling him of the battle she had waged, before the stately dignity of the old-fashioned room had yielded to her vandalism in the way of rose-colored pillows; giddy little tables which held nothing, and were not made to hold anything, and would not have known how to hold anything had they been unexpectedly requested to do so; big, soft chairs shamelessly comfortable, and how the old-time furniture had worn an air of such scorn, and made everything so uncomfortable with its superior airs, and had so oppressed the new things with a sense of being

vulgar interlopers, that she had at last given up any hope of their ever becoming reconciled to each other and had banished the old furniture to the garret.

"Where it can sulk all it likes and make no one uncomfortable," she wound up.

Falls followed her back to the hearth at last, silently, as he had been following her about the room, conscious that she was finding him distinctly difficult, but powerless to break the spell that held him. He seemed to be breathing the south wind, charged with the perfume of the white star jasmime, piquant and heady, and it quickened the pace of life to where speech seemed a puerile encumbrance.

And Joan *was* finding him difficult. The more so, that with this strange, new divination she was able to read his mood — nay, to feel a dangerous kinship to it!

She thought regretfully of her childish privilege, when she might draw a stool in front of a favored guest, and, propping her rosy chin upon her palm, simply and frankly stare, and stare — until she had dreamed out her dreams.

Falls's austere personality, his lonely life, had touched her imagination, piqued her interest; she was conscious of a keen, intellectual curiosity regarding this new tremulousness which seized her at the touch of his firm hand, the glance of his grave eyes. With an innocent adroitness she seated Falls, as one forces a card upon a trusting victim, just where the only light in the dusky room fell upon him, seating herself opposite, with only the red glow of the hearth to show Falls a dim picture of her in the low cane chair.

Other men had sat thus under that clear-eyed scrutiny, had been appreciated — admired — and each had gone his

way, safe from enchantment, leaving it to Falls and fate to bring into those clear eyes the softness which had turned them from stars to violets.

How strong he was, and how calm! How — handsome? Yes, with his cold face thus relaxed and dreaming, Falls had a virile beauty she had not dreamed he possessed; she had thought him plain looking, though she admired his forcefulness.

After a while he roused himself and, smiling, turned full toward her with a laughing consciousness of her critical examination of him, and began to talk to her of his work, his impressions of Adairville, his acquaintances at the hotel — all with a genial cleverness, without a shade of bitterness, yet streaked with an acrid humor that made the girl wince.

When Falls rose to go Joan walked with him to the hall, to Falls's secret surprise. As she stood beside him, while he got his coat, he wondered if this sweet attendance was a part of what he had come to call bitterly "the program."

She paused upon the threshold to give him her hand, and the question slipped from his lips:

"Do you go to the door with other men — other callers, I mean?"

This was not an occasion for the exercise of what Hugh called Joan's "man-sense." Her feminine wits were quite sufficient to divine the wistful jealousy that underlay Falls's deliberation.

"Yes," she told him inexorably, "that is — nearly all of them. Father sees his own company out, but my own callers — why, yes, I do! But —" Falls's big simplicity made coquetry impossible, unworthy — "but it is only a

custom! You see, in old times there were servants about to attend guests; but now"—a little laugh escaped her—"Milly Ann has her own young man to look after, I have n't the heart to expect her to leave him to look after—mine!"

"Oh," said Falls, "another 'old Southern custom'! When shall I ever have mastered them all?"

"Don't you like it?" asked Joan, a little wistfulness in her own voice.

"Like it!" She saw that he did not affect to misunderstand. "I should think I did like it! Do you know, Miss Adair," he went on earnestly, "I have been to all sorts of places where men go, at home and abroad, but I have never seen any place that for sheer, actual charm—the charm of the place, you know—can touch Dixie! It takes hold of a man like a possession! If I could talk poetry like Hallett, I should tell you the fancy I've had about the place ever since I have known it: Dixie lies here hidden away in the Appalachian Mountains, like a very Frau Venus of lands, drawing men's hearts to her and filling them with longing—unpeased longing! Did you really credit me with the bad taste not to like Dixie?"

Under his deep gaze Joan faltered. How much did he know, how far did he understand?

"I thought," she began gently, but going on more firmly, "I fancied—feared, I mean—that you did not care for the place—the people; and I, why, I regretted it because these are the people I know and—love!" she wound up desperately.

Night's velvet, sweeping round them, cut them off from the world. Joan seemed wonderfully near to him, all

else wonderfully far away and absolutely futile. Falls was at the turning of that way, that dim, sweet way which had always been just ahead; here, close at his side, was the warm, living presence whose form he had seen so often in the primrose path just ahead.

For months the girl had been so near in thought that no barriers remained between them. Not a rag of reserve hampered him as he told her, in the terse, trenchant speech of his every-day life, of the network of intangible difficulties that beset him. In his harsh voice, broken by pauses of sheer exasperation, she read the struggle which he had made against a foe unknown, uncomprehended; worse — unassailable!

"Antagonism?" he cried. "Sure! But why? In God's name, why should there be antagonism to me? Besides, I see — see clearly enough now — they must have fought the syndicate the same way! That would explain their willingness to sell. The Tennessee Valley Improvement sacrificed the plant, you know. But is the town mad? Will they always make war upon enterprise in this way? When I came here to look into this deal everything was so fair, so plausible."

Joan stood beside him in silence. How was she to interpret for him, how far dared she go? Her face, as she pondered, grew wonderfully like her father's. She grasped the points in Falls's broken recital, full as it was of terms which she but vaguely understood, with the clear-headed acumen that so delighted the old statesman and lawyer, reading each hiatus in Falls's broken narrative with a woman's intuitive perception. Joan saw, through that marvelous medium which holds suspended in its ether-realized solution the elements of both reason and logic, —

but which operates independently of either,—the inward meaning of the situation so meaningless to Falls. But how could she make him understand?

“Do you think, Mr. Falls,” she said at last, haltingly, “do you think there is an organized effort to break you down — force you out?”

“There is not a doubt of it!” with a short laugh. “But who? You see, Miss Adair, in business, motives are not at all complex; shades of meaning do not trouble business men. The tape-line which we apply to men’s motives, in business, has on it but one word, ‘self-interest,’ and it is usually ample and always fits — always until this case. Here I am at sea because I have lost my chart. So far as I can see, the element of self-interest does not enter here. Suppose I fail here, who would be benefited? One of two things would happen: I should be forced to sell at a tremendous sacrifice, or allow the plant to revert to the syndicate, losing all I had put in. I should be ruined — that’s easily on the cards. If Adairville was a man, as I am, the personal equation must needs be reckoned with; but a town — a corporation —? It is impossible to conceive of malice toward me, with the thing!”

“Have you seen no evidences of personal malice?”

“Plenty,” he said shortly, “but they grew out of this — er — this other thing, which I cannot divine.”

“But suppose, Mr. Falls, just suppose that a home company — Adairville men — were to organize a company of their own with local capital, local interest —”

“I see,” said Falls; “it would be a good scheme. I have wondered it has not been done! But they are timid here and, forgive me, lazy! The climate, I suppose. There really seems to be a constitutional inability to endure the

long, hard strain such as men in the Northern and Eastern States are under, year after year; practically, business is suspended here in the hot months. I really don't wonder! I suppose by the time I have been here ten years I shall wear white linen and smoke cigarettes all day as Hallett does!"

"Is not Mr. Hallett a good business man? I thought he was tireless!"

"Hallett is a schemer—a promoter, you know; he drew me into this—you knew that? Then why, if a home company wanted the power company, did they not take it up? It had been on the market quite a bit before Wheatley nabbed me! Why did they not organize then?"

"It is better for them this way—can't you see? You have done so much, put it all in such good shape; it was all—er—messy before, was n't it? Now, if they can squeeze you—it was 'squeeze' you called it, was n't it?—well, it will be just—what was it you said?—pie?—pie for them, won't it?"

Falls looked down at the head so near his sleeve in amazement. That sweet, drawling voice, with the halting phrases of a child, was coolly presenting in a dozen sentences a scheme of fraud and dishonesty that he, hard man of the world, had not even dreamed. And it all hung together; it offered a solution to many puzzling aspects of the matter. Yet, could it be?

Falls was silent; he gazed straight ahead at the dark lawn while he tested the chain of reason, of probability. Then he laughed the tender laugh of reluctant incredulity with which a man declares against a woman's point of view, when the woman is herself his point of view!

"Is that the way you do business, Miss Adair?"

"No," she said a little shyly; "but then, you see, I belong here; no one would collogue—is it collogue?—against me. It is like my family circle—"

"Ah! And I am the stranger within your gates! I see!"

"Yes," said she softly, with a glance which mitigated the words, "yes; the stranger within their gates!"

Falls, plunged anew into thought, lingered, and Joan hurried him laughingly.

"You must go!" she said. "It is late—so late they have put out the lights!"

Falls's bent brows went up in a smile almost boyishly teasing. "Is this a sample of the way you keep up with local matters? Do you think I put the town lights out when I go to bed?"

Joan was taking a moment off, and did not answer instantly. "How charming he is—like that!" she was thinking in silent amazement. "Why, he looks like a boy when he grins, and shows those big white teeth!"

"But they *are* out," she said.

Falls did not raise his eyes from her face as he answered. He was drawing heavily upon the moments as they sped by; he must go in a moment.

"The belt has slipped; they will come on in a moment."

"But the engines would be running—"

He was listening now for the distant pounding which should have been audible from across the hill; but all was silent.

"George!" he muttered; but he lingered yet a moment, bending his tall head down to Joan. The night

wind, passing, boldly threw a shining tendril of her hair across his head.

“In this fight that is coming, do I count you on my side?” he asked hurriedly, holding her eyes with his own strong gaze.

“Yes; I am always for — What is the English battle-cry?”

“‘God and St. George!’” said Falls, laughing back as he ran down the steps.

“No, no! I mean the modern one! ‘Tommy Atkins’s,’ you know!”

“Oh!” Falls ran back up the steps, crossed the space with a stride, and held out his hand; as she laid her own within it, he said eagerly: “Do you mean, ‘Fair play and the best man’ — Yes?”

He hesitated, raising his bent brows in smiling entreaty; then touched the hand he held softly with his lips.

“Thank you; good night!”

VIII

A BATTLE OF THE STRONG

FALLS turned from Judge Adair's gate and struck across the outskirts of the town to the power-house. Adairville is built upon the foot-hills which nestle at the base of the long spur of the Cumberlands, whose dim, blue ramparts keep watch and ward down the length of the lovely Tennessee Valley. The resident portion of the town had climbed these round hilltops, and, spreading its foliage-trimmed skirts about it, looked back with well-bred exclusiveness upon its humbler neighbors in the cup-like valley at its feet.

Falls came out at the high gate on the hilltop, and the town lay at his feet wrapped in gloom. A stratum of diffused light from the stars hung overhead, well up above the lines of inky foliage which defined the streets. His eye swept the darkness from point to point, where the arc-lights were wont to shine bravely forth, only to be met by darkness at every point; from where he stood he should have been able to see the glowworm lights of the cars, passing and repassing, in a tangled dance, but the coverlid of blackest night was unpierced by a ray.

Premonition of disaster had become certainty by this time; but nothing real, no matter how disastrous, ever found Falls inadequate. He met opposition of this kind

with an absolutely unshakable, unassailable belief in his own power to overcome it. There was no emotion in this feeling; it had nothing to do with the high courage and dauntless daring which carries a man across the open to storm a battery; it was more the sure knowledge of what he might expect of himself, given such and such conditions, which an engineer has when he sets himself to change the face of nature, to tunnel a mountain or turn a river from its course.

Within the last three hours Falls had covered a wide range of emotional experience. His nerves, which three hours ago had thrilled in the clear heat of a strong man's first passion, now were strung taut; he was ready for instant action.

He went rapidly, but before he reached the power-house every possible phase of the accident, as he conceived it to be, had been methodically considered and disposed of.

As he dashed into the yards in the direction of the engine-rooms, a jarring discord broke with appalling significance upon his ear. In an instant he had recognized the beat and swing, the rush and crash, the resistless jar of machinery out of control, and for a second a very paralysis of will seemed to fall upon him, striking him motionless where he stood.

In that stark instant Falls saw himself confronted by a blind, disorganized energy, non-human, yet made vital with a maniacal intelligence, animated by a mad will of its own to a very lust of power!

Darkness met him everywhere; the yards were deserted, and in the intervals of the splitting crash and roar which came intermittently, Falls called vainly: "McCormack! Martin!"

His foot struck a lantern dropped from some fleeing hand, and in a moment a feeble light was contending with the masses of huddled shadows; as Falls swung the lantern back and forth, gaunt arms and queer, contorted shapes, retreating and advancing with giant strides, threatened to engulf him. The wide doors of the engine-room stood open, the forward part in pitchy blackness—the end open to the starlit sky without, against which a jagged mass of broken timbers shook and trembled with the pounding of the great engines below.

Falls's ear was attuned to the uproar by this time; he read the discord as a musician reads a familiar opera. He followed, as though with his eye, what was happening in that black cave of turmoil; he knew that slithering rush across the floor, like the treading of great beasts, was the writhing body of the broken belt imprisoned by the falling timbers and tortured among the madly whirling wheels.

Falls was a clever machinist; he knew as he knew the fingers of his right hand these great engines; he knew each bolt and bar, each rod and piston; knew whence came this mad energy, this delirium of power. He could fit together their uttermost parts; they were his creatures, he loved them, and he felt an odd sympathy in their brief escape from thraldom.

Setting the lantern upon the floor behind him, he threw off his long coat and stood in his evening dress. Hat, coat, vest, and even collar followed; he stripped as a gladiator for the combat; and he looked not unlike one with his arms bare, the arch of his great chest showing through the thin dress shirt.

He stepped into the shadowy cave, whose walls rang

with the resonance of the whirring machinery. A stride from the engines he paused, and waited for that rush along the floor to announce to him the one second when he might spring forward to the valve, and back to safety.

It came; the great, gray form weirdly undulating along the floor like the dun form of some antediluvian monster. It had a moment of fierce wrestling with the imprisoning timbers, and then the sinuous body reared itself aloft in a mad duel with the centrifugal force tending to fling it from the wheel, back upon itself. That was Falls's moment; while these Titans wrestled, he sprang forward to the valve. A moment of deft handling, a quick turn of his practised wrist, a backward spring to safety; then with a mighty blow the belt swung round more slowly under the lessening impulse of the slowing engines. A few convulsive quivers, a shivering sob from the engines, and the inert mass sank into lax, gray immobility.

As Falls turned to pick up his coat, he found the lantern in the hand of one of his workmen, a heavy-set young Scotchman whom Falls had befriended years before when a stranger and penniless; the lad was about to go down in the maelstrom of the streets of New York, and he had brought him with him to the South.

The lad was a clever machinist, with all of the brute courage which so often accompanies phlegmatic nerve in men of his type. Falls had never seen it falter before; that it should have failed him thus seemed too incredible for belief. He took the lantern from the boy's hand, lifting it to look keenly at him.

"Get me some whiskey, McCormack, will you?" he said at last to the lad, who had not yet spoken, not even to ask the cause of the tumult, or, more significant, to

explain his own unaccustomed presence at this hour. Falls drank the whiskey when it came, and, as he returned the glass to McCormack, he gave him an odd word of thanks.

"Damn you!" he said, with cold fury, and in a level tone which cut like a file upon raw flesh, "I'll settle with you in the morning!"

The Adairville Power and Passenger Company had been one of the many investments of an Eastern syndicate, whose local habitation was an office in Wall Street, and whose shibboleth was "The Tennessee Valley Improvement Company."

In the early days of the new South this syndicate had poured out its capital by millions into the green valleys and along the still waters of the lovely Tennessee River. It had been among the foremost in the campaign of capital which had followed the relaxing grasp of the iron hand of reconstruction upon the South; it had led the van when the second army of invasion came down in Pullman cars to wage a new war of conquest in this lovely land of their desire.

Seen from car windows, and by eyes focussed to Eastern vision, Alabama in the early eighties had seemed a land of financial promise beyond the utmost dreams of dividends — a land whose fields lay fallow in inglorious ease, awaiting only the Midas touch of Eastern capital to stagger under a golden harvest. And Eastern capitalists had been quick to read the South's sad astrology in the silent market-places of her battered towns, her empty fields, her undeveloped mineral lands. The Tennessee Valley Improvement Company had bought with insatia-

ble greed fields, and streams, and mountainsides, as unconscious of the incorporeal hereditaments appurtenant thereto as of the transient colors which flushed the long, green mountain ranges.

They came like the spirit of progress moving upon the face of the waters to the Valley of the Tennessee, which lay like the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty, dumb in a trance of despair, and waked it with the kiss of gold to life and purpose; they set afloat throughout its length a current of enterprise upon which the Adairville Power and Passenger Company was but a straw, casting forth, with unhesitating conviction, upon the stagnant streams of Southern industry and commerce, blind seemingly to the undertow which, instead of floating them dividends, might in time suck down their fleets!

This was all in that halcyon time in the early eighties, when the East was playing "King Cophetua" to the South's "Beggar Maid." Thirty years lay between Lincoln's Emancipation and the South's own emancipation; her own arm, grown sturdy with toil, struck off the last shackles of slavery when regret was cast behind. Then the New South was born: first-fruit of the union of the East and South. And that lusty infant, wasting no time over the gory annals of the past, kicked the swaddling-clothes from its vigorous limbs and held out strenuous hands to the East, and the East hastened to fill them with gold.

Then the Tennessee Valley Improvement Company bestirred itself; and with its faith in its own perspicuity a little frayed, perhaps, sent down an agent to Alabama — "an all-round good man, plenty capable" — with definite instructions to start those sluggish streams of dividends

in the direction of the Wall Street offices, and to promote its interest all along the line of its investments in Alabama. Hallett stayed for twelve months in Alabama, looking into the syndicate's concerns, and at the end of that time advised among other retrenchments the sale of the Power and Passenger plant. The stockholders muttered; the investment was a sound one; Adairville was a growing town.

Hallett, though a trifle reticent as to his reasons, stuck inflexibly to his position. It was not that his explanations lacked frankness or his language lucidity; it was, as he stated, that his audience lacked the viewpoint which would enable them fully to appreciate the cogency of his argument. At this some of the stockholders had laughed, and swore as they laughed.

There had followed a puzzled résumé of the situation and resources, and further keen questioning of Hallett as to his reasons for the sale of the plant. Finally the unwieldy corporation decided that, hampered by a multitude of interests, it could not investigate, but — it could sell.

As a matter of fact, Falls had found the affairs of the Power and Passenger Company in good shape; all was fair, open, perfectly regular; every condition met, every explanation given in Hallett's lucid speech to every sordid detail, to which his clear-cut New England accent seemed to add a refining touch.

Yet, from the very first, Falls had been conscious, dimly, of some intangible obstacle in the way of his investigation into the conditions which formed the environment of the Power and Passenger Company's plant. It was an impalpable thing, which all of Falls's perspicacity

failed to reduce to definiteness of perception. His senses took cognizance of it, it is true, but too vaguely to afford him a distinct mental impression. It eluded him at every point. To his mind, seeking to grasp it, define it, fix its limits, it was what a floating film of silvery spider's web is to the senses. It is only visible in a chance beam of light; it is scarcely more palpable to the touch than is the beam of light itself, yet one knows that it is there.

The Power and Passenger Company was a big deal to handle alone; all that Falls had, all that he was, was in it. He stood alone to confront the situation, as a duellist his opponent, with a nerve so flawless and a resolution so unbending as to put him upon a plane almost equal to that of the inorganic forces with which he had to deal. Falls was the type of man from which is drawn the great Captains of Industry who have changed the face of the commercial world; nature had set his mind to the broad gage of continental thought; he had spent his life in the great market-places of the world, had acquired his perspective from the heights of an impersonal vision that measured life and men and business in their relation to the world of men, rather than by the inch-rule of their relation to him as an individual.

To Falls, "the South" meant the southern part of the United States of America; and, barring climatic and geographical conditions, which had their equivalents elsewhere, it was as the rest of the world is.

The social element had not entered at all into Falls's analysis of the situation, though in a dim, reflex way he had been conscious all along of the natural charm of the place and the surrounding country. The beautiful valley

of the Tennessee, walled by its ramparts of mountains, as blue as the autumn distance, delighted him; the wide, white streets, muffled in deep dust, whose double line of arching elms made dim green tunnels of them even in the blazing days of June, when he had first seen them, pleased him; the easy, social life of club and hotel seemed to Falls's unaccustomed mind to have almost the charm of a family circle.

After the rush and grind of his more strenuous life, Falls had rested, unconsciously soothed, by the platitudes of this simpler life.

His awakening, it seemed, was at hand, when Falls was to struggle, a lion amid the toils, in the meshes which this "simpler life" had woven about his feet.

IX

AN HONORABLE UNDERSTANDING AMONG GENTLEMEN

AS though by prearrangement with Falls's evil genius — under the direct, personal supervision of that dignitary indeed — a week of December rain and storm followed upon the accident to the power plant.

Short days, which scarcely got their weeping eyes half-open, were shortened by low nimbus clouds, from whose black under-surfaces trailed a curtain of clammy mist beaded with sleety rain. Nights of persistent blackness succeeded each other in ominous procession of gloom, while from mills and factories, stores and offices, — nay, from the town as from one throat, — rose anathemas loud and deep against the crippled plant.

In business circles but one topic obtained; not Falls and his disabled plant, however, as might have been expected. Falls was for the moment ignored in favor of the more grateful subject of municipal shortcomings.

About the dripping street-corners, in the lobbies of the hotels and the Dixie Club, at meetings of church societies and guilds, the incredible, the shameful, "the p-e-r-fectly d-i-sgraceful" state of municipal matters, was discussed with animation by the committees of ladies who

had in charge the "civic" department of Adairville's progress.

The city council, sullen, but secretly anxious to placate the town, held meeting after meeting, at which speeches were made, resolutions adopted, looking to the rescinding of the city's contracts with Falls should the works fail to be in operation within the two weeks' time limit, which formed a clause in the contracts.

An election was decided upon and hurriedly held, putting before the town the question of a bond issue for the erection of a municipal plant. Adairville returned a solid vote in favor of the bond issue, and Adairville's city council, secure in its long suit, waited the lead with smiling complacency.

To consider the "lead" which was now before the town, a small, very select coterie met at Hallett's offices upon a night about a week after the plant had suspended operations. The city council was well represented at the meeting, which was "entirely of a private character," the remainder of the select circle being local capitalists and one or two "outsiders," of whom Hallett was one and the Honorable Anthony Cruikshanks, the newly appointed judge of the newly organized Tenth Judicial Circuit, embracing Holmes County, was the other. The meeting had been quietly called together to discuss the erection of a municipal plant; but, oddly enough, its discussion seemed to involve much low-voiced consultation as to the reorganization of the insolvent Mount Ely Gas Company, whose affairs, it developed, were being most opportunely wound up by its receiver in the Honorable Anthony Cruikshanks's court, sitting in chancery.

The Honorable Anthony Cruikshanks, who was known

throughout the length and breadth of his circuit as well as to the town as "Tony," was, it had been more than hinted by grateful constituents, the most "useful" member of Adairville's body politic.

Cruikshanks was a man of many and varied attainments. A clever lawyer, temperate and cool of counsel, Tony was possessed of every qualification necessary to make him a boon companion, except such as would have disqualified him for the position of ready, efficient, and supremely discreet tool of the men who used him, not without misgiving as to a time in the future when Tony might in his turn use them. He was easily the most popular man in business in Adairville, with a left-handed popularity which included him in the business affairs but ignored him in the pleasures of the men with whom he went.

Hallett was speaking "informally," but with a very businesslike keenness and directness, to the group of men scattered about his office.

"Now, gentlemen," he said in his clear, resonant voice, "we understand fully, do we, that we organize the Cumberland Gas Company at the instance of Adairville's city council, to enable them to — ah — to tide over the exigencies of the situation here, resulting from the practical failure of the electric 'Power and Passenger' company to fill its contracts? and that we have the — the city's and county's contracts also? That is correct, eh, Mr. Greer? Oh, of course! Until the city has its own plant in operation." A somewhat constrained silence followed upon the cessation of Hallett's pleasant voice. He was carrying matters with too high a hand to suit some of his audience.

A smile flickered in the eyes of the lounging circle, and like summer lightning died, without having touched the quiet faces of Hallett's audience.

Neely, the tough fibre of whose mind was as little conscious of social tension as his body of atmospheric pressure, rose at last, his bull-like presence seeming to override opposition by mere preponderance of bulk.

"No company will be organized unless that is distinctly understood," he said sullenly, and dropped his soft bulk skilfully back into the exact spot whence he had risen.

Hallett's unruffled voice, brisk and invigorating, cleared the atmosphere of murkiness.

"Carmichael, what news have you of Mr. Falls? Carmichael," he added in bland explanation, "is Falls's up-town manager, and has his affairs generally in charge during his absence —"

A little laugh, gentle and lazy, went the rounds of the circle, in which Carmichael himself joined, though his eyes—busy with his untidy cigarette—were grave.

"Aye," said General Evert dryly, "we've met Jimmy before, thank you, Hallett. When 'll Falls git back, son?"

"Mr. Falls," said "son" with guarded precision, "is in Cincinnati having machinery recast to replace his smash-up —"

"What he 's doing don't cut any special figure! When 'll he be back, boy?"

"This week — les'n his foot slips!"

"I suppose this sale is 'bliged to be advertised — eh, Tony?"

"'Bliged to be, Mr. Frazier! 'The law awards it, and the Court —'"

"Git out! I 've known the law, and the courts, too,

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for twice as long nearly as you 've been born, Tony! Don't you come here telling *me* what the law awards! It 's the rottenest, old sifter-bottom — ”

“ The law,” said Tony, in his newly found judicial manner, fixing his brilliant goggled eyes behind their gold-rimmed glasses upon the irate old man, “ ‘the law is a cobweb where the big flies break through, and the little ones stick!’ You 've been a big fly hereabouts always, Mr. Frazier. It holds the little flies fast enough!”

“ When is this sale set for, Tony?” asked Hallett.

“ Tenth of January, twelve o'clock, noon,” answered Tony with brief exactness.

“ And Falls will not be here on that date, you say, Jimmy?”

“ Yep,” said Jimmy, his grave eyes still on his cigarette.

“ Well? Say on, can't you, Jimmy. We want to get away fum here sometime to-night!”

“ In case he is not here—and he won't be—Watson will bid for him; and he 's to double up any d—— little local concern twice over, if it comes to that.”

This last was so plainly a quotation, and Neely turned so furious a face upon Falls's luckless up-town manager, that that easy-going gentleman turned sideways upon Hallett's desk and laughed long and silently amid the wreck of Hallett's elegant appointments.

“ I 'll be there when local concerns begin to be doubled up!” cried Neely with fierce acrimony; and Carmichael laughed again his hearty, ringing laugh that made men like him, in spite of their better judgment.

“ Then you 'll beat me, Neely,” he said, as he rose to follow the dispersing company. “ I 'm going to take the

boys down on Injin creek nutting; don't you wanter come erlong? It 's goin' to be clear by then."

"Here, you fellows, I want to say a word before this meeting breaks up—"

"Well, well, Bolling, shorely; but — won't next week do — the week after? I 'm fur home now; the Madam will be asking why I 'm out so late—"

"Git out, Uncle Milt," said Bolling with amiable disrespect, "Aunt Matilda won't begin to look for you before daylight! You 'd as well sit down; I 'm going to talk now."

Bolling spoke in a rapid, blundering way, yet with the air of a man accustomed to be listened to; and he *was* listened to. Not a man present lost a word of his discourse — clipped, broken, stumbling, but forcibly impressive, the speech of a man who never spoke when he could avoid it, never failed to say exactly what he meant, and never revoked a word once spoken.

"I 'm chairman of this infernal board of control — much control we have! But, well, I 've found out that Falls has about got his matters in shape. He 'll have his machinery here inside the time limit; the works out there will be in full blast before this week is out. Now, unless we want litigation — in the Federal courts, too — we 'd best go easy in this talk about the contracts — yet awhile. The city's contracts are going to stop where they are — Greer will do as he likes; but 'Dairville is not going to butt into Watson and the Federal court as long as I have anything to do with her — and I think I have —" Bolling was struggling into his coat now, and he made no further attempt to end his blunt speech; it seemed to require neither conclusion nor comment.

HONORABLE UNDERSTANDING 111

"Bolling," said Neely sullenly, as the two made their way along the unlighted streets, "I like your standing up for that d—— Yankee erginst ow' own folks!"

"I 'm glad you 're pleased, Neely," said Bolling serenely, and Neely relapsed into fresh gloom.

"Why don't you resign?" he inquired hopefully, a moment later.

"I rather thought I 'd see this thing through first; I may then. Look there!" Bolling pointed to where a candle stuck in a bottle glimmered absurdly at each corner of the Court-house Square amid the engulfing darkness. "That sort of thing is enough to make any man resign — anything! I tell you, Neely, this is undignified — this is regular hazing! Are we boys playing marbles — or is this a city administration?" went on Bolling in furious recitative.

Neely laughed and laughed again; but his words, when he spoke, bore a grim significance.

"Naw," he said ponderously; "naw, we 're not playing marbles, Johnny. And nobody ain't making no fool of your precious board of control, neither. God A'mighty 'tended to that Hisse'f!"

"Well," remarked Bolling simply, "I was a great hand at marbles when I was a kid; used to just rake 'em in! Breeches pockets always loaded — big box at home!" He stopped to indulge in a graceless, reminiscent chuckle at his infantile gambling. "But," he went on, "I did n't fudge then — and I don't somehow take to it now! Yes, I 'll see this contract business through, Neely, Yankee or no Yankee, nigger-lover or nigger-hater — I'm white myself! Oh, naw, no offence. Good night."

"Come in, General," said Hallett, as he and General

Evert reached his chambers over the First National Bank; and with a strange oblivion to the Madam's possible remarks the General accepted Hallett's invitation.

"Gad, sir, you 're well fixed up here!" he remarked with envious admiration of the young bachelor's freedom.

"Well," Hallett asked after an interval, "what 's doing, General?"

"Nothing, where Watson is concerned. Tony came up to the scratch without a balk," answered Evert with dry brevity.

"He never balks," with cool scorn. "How did Watson take it? Did he let out any hint?"

Evert transferred his impassive gaze to Hallett's face and let it dwell there a moment, as though he saw Hallett for the first time and found him an interesting development in credulity.

"He said," Evert resumed after that silent colloquy was ended, "that his — ah — his practice engrossed his entire time, and that as he was already attorney for the Power Company, and as his client would no doubt — that is, it was a possibility — that Falls would bid himself, there was nothing in it. I have n't seen Hugh take the trouble to play the fool in years that he did in our talk; he 's about given it up with me."

"Could he not be persuaded to join us?" asked Hallett smoothly, but with a tightening lip and a dilating nostril which caught the older man's eye as it was intended to do. Evert's gaze grew more peremptory as he waited, with impatience, Hallett's elaborate finessing.

"I think," Hallett went on with visible enjoyment of his strategic approach, "that if I was to press a little button, he 'd probably do the rest."

He paused; the subtle change which did duty for a smile had passed over Evert's impassive face.

Evert never smiled in the sense of amusement, yet he was a boon companion; he had never been known to smile in sympathy with another's joy, yet men—and women, too—took to him their joys and their sorrows, and he never failed to add to the one, and measurably, at least, to mitigate the other. Life had winnowed every tenderer emotion from him, leaving an empty shell, from which flowed a tonic of bitter philosophy—a caustic which seared alike friend and foe; but to the one's hurt, to the other's healing.

"A string on Watson, sonny?" he inquired mildly; "what's it made of?"

"Whipecord," he said tersely. "The same sort as those whips are made of that they say our pleasant vices twist for us," he added, unconsciously adopting Falls's simile.

"A-y-e," said Evert, "it's in him! But has it come out in any form we can lay hold of—anything material?"

"Very material; it's documentary evidence, and of the most damning sort!"

He rose as he spoke, and, opening the secret drawer of his desk, took out the letter which he and Falls had found weeks before in the square, and tossed it across the table to General Evert.

The General mounted a pair of benevolent spectacles, and, without surprise or comment, read the letter through. He folded it, and threw it carelessly upon the table.

"You mean to put the screws on Betty?"

Hallett winced; screws, and Betty's rose-white flesh! Evert was unnecessarily brutal—sometimes. Hallett's eyes wavered, and the old man saw it.

"It 's useless otherwise; it may be useless anyway. Women are so d—— forgiving!"

"Is it so important to have Watson in this?" Hallett temporized.

"All-important; Watson carries more weight than any one man, in 'Dairville or out of it, in Holmes County. And that 's not all; Falls is Watson's client, and there 's no fooling Hugh! He is on to this already, or I am much mistaken. He took his glasses off the moment I edged on to the subject—"

"Took them off?"

"He always takes them off when he thinks he 's got what he wants. I 've had him after me in the witness-box,—those little railroad matters,—confound him!"

"Watson broke your nerve on the stand, General," said Hallett coolly. "Now 's your chance to see how he looks under the screw himself. Perhaps he 'll have more than he wants after our little interview," he finished with vindictive complaisance.

General Evert sat erect, regarding his companion with unfeigned astonishment, not altogether unmixed with guarded admiration.

"'Little interview'?" he echoed shrewdly. "Were you thinking of opening this matter to Hugh face to face, Hallett?"

"How?" said Hallett, his carefully trained Southern brogue falling from him, the combative blood of his Pilgrim forefathers pricking in his veins, the tough, unbending spirit of old New England setting his handsome boyish face like flint. "Why not face to face? We are not on the Yallobusha, General, 'where there are n't no ten commandments'!"

HONORABLE UNDERSTANDING 115

"I — I don't keep up with literature these days, sonny; I lost track of the Decalogue forty years ago. I never was," modestly, "exactly an authority on those old Mosaic matters. But — how many commandments should you say were in common use in Holmes County to-day, Hallett?"

"I cannot recall but one," murmured Hallett to his cigar, "and then there is the one I propose to remind Watson of —"

"I 'd like to be by when you remind Hugh that 'thou shalt not'!"

"Oh," murmured Hallett with modest deprecation, "there will be nothing spectacular — nothing for the galleries. It will be just as easy 'as falling off a log.'"

"Well, le' me know when you 've fallen off. Good night — the Madam —"

"I 'll light you down, General —"

"Never mind — never mind, sonny. I 've walked in darkness for sixty years; a light might make me stumble. There are those" — he turned his impassive face to Hallett without a trace of humor — "those who malign me by saying that I *prefur* darkness to light. But — we all have our detractors — eh, son?"

X

THOU SHALT NOT

H ALLETT chose a moment, a few nights later, for his face-to-face interview with Watson; and chose it with the cautious diplomacy which characterized him. As he had shrewdly prophesied, there was nothing in the brief talk which would have afforded to a third person, had one been present, the slightest clue to the real import of the dozen careless sentences that passed between them.

He had sauntered in late to his dinner at the Adair Hotel, and found the big, bright dining-room crowded with guests; there seemed difficulty in finding a seat for Hallett, and Jim Bow, Hallett's pet waiter, rolled his despairing eye toward a table where Watson dined alone. But between that table and "de ginural public" lay the stern mandate of the head waiter, and Elias was a person to be obeyed. Now the question which agitated the little, hard nut of a brain tucked away under Jim Bow's elaborately barbered wool was this: was Mr. Hallett to be construed as "de ginural public"? Jim Bow decided not, and began a crawfish-like progress toward the forbidden table. Hallet saw, and diplomatically seized his opportunity.

"I 'll dine with Mr. Watson, Jim Bow; this will do perfectly!" The nimble coin slid into Jim Bow's ubiqui-

tous palm, and Hugh looked up astonished to find Hallett at his elbow.

"Ah, Watson!" Hallett seated himself and ran his eye around the crowded room. It was an ideal opportunity. He nodded here and there with his cold geniality, and, turning to his perfectly silent companion, said in precisely the tone of polite, perfunctory inquiry with which the whole world inquires concerning the welfare of one another's relatives:

"How is Rosebud? How does she like—ah, Ohio?"

It was so boldly, so admirably done—time, place, and circumstance so skilfully chosen—that for one brief moment Watson staggered under the impact of the unexpected assault, a moment which afforded to Hallett a taste of keen triumph. Watson's glance reinforced by his glasses—he had cursed the evil chance which caught him with them on—met Hallett's own in stern question; and there was that in the look which brought to Hallett's mind a sudden memory of icicle lances hanging from the eaves of his distant New England home, so cold, so hard, so piercing. Watson calmly removed his glasses, making a place for them among the dishes at his elbow, and turned his indefinite gaze upon Hallett.

"She likes it pretty well, I believe," said Hugh, after the exact interval had elapsed which bored unconcern would naturally have spaced. "Milly Ann—Joan's maid—hears from her, and Joan was telling me that she is making quite remarkable progress." The colorless indifference of the tone turned Hallett's flank neatly and left him to take the initiative once more.

The waiter had returned with Hallett's dinner, and busied himself with deft arrangement of the dishes, Hal-

leett applying himself to his soup with the reserved enthusiasm of a man who does not, lightly, allow anything to come between himself and his dinner. Presently he resumed:

"Interesting class, these — octoroons?"

"Where?" said Watson, and turned his helpless gaze upon the crowded room of immaculate diners.

Under Hallett's cool glance of understanding, Watson's heavy features were stolid to the point of absolute stupidity; his dull gaze under half-closed lids, his long, flexible lips devoid of humor, the heavy, bear-like lurch of his great form — all seemed purely, frankly animal.

As Hallett marked the sensuous curve of the man's heavy jaw, the drooping eyelid, a cold qualm seized him. What if, after all, his weapon should fall blunted from Watson's armor of callousness? Such things were common. Hallett's mind glanced backward over all he had heard of General Evert — his life, his experiences — which he had himself epitomized in that scathing epigram: "Women are so d—— forgiving!"

Hallett mused. This acid with which he had meant to corrode Watson's life would only bite into a pure metal. What if, after all was told, it should roll innocuous from the baser metal of the man's sensual soul? The blow, then, must be struck straight at the center of Watson's heart, where lay the image of Betty Archer guarded, Cerberus-like, by his honor. Dinner progressed; the waiters hovered near, other guests were seated. Watson arose finally, and, adjusting his glasses, met Hallett's glance once more squarely with his own. The glance was a rapier now, upon whose shining blade was carved a message of both challenge and reprisal.

Upon leaving the hotel Hugh turned with a sense of oppression from his offices and his rooms, seeking gratefully the solitude of the cold winter night outside.

Hallett's mine so adroitly sprung had not found him unprepared. As General Evert had ruefully presaged, Watson had picked up the thread of the scheme, without difficulty, from the General's attempted sounding, and had subsequently evolved the details. The blundering, which had so exasperated General Evert upon the occasion of his talk with Watson, had in reality covered Hugh's profound amazement at the boldness with which the game was being played. Every man in the new Cumberland Gas Company deal knew that Watson was attorney for the "Power" company — and Falls's friend; yet a proposition had been tacitly made him to lend his name as president to the organization of a rival company being organized, with scarcely an effort at concealment, to make war upon his client, and, if possible, to break him down.

The unprecedented boldness of the thing had in itself placed the end of the thread within Hugh's hand; and he had followed it smoothly to the conclusion that something more than met the ear lay beneath the unusual proposition. There had been about it, to Hugh's ear, the coercive ring of a demand; the employment of General Evert as an emissary was significant. Following, with blind steps, the clue to that peremptory note, Hugh had decided that he was to be lashed into the company under the scourge of public opinion. In other words, the town offered him this opportunity to retrieve the position which he had taken for Falls against his townsmen. On his refusal to turn Falls over to the arms of Moloch, he would himself share with Falls social ostracism.

Watson had laughed at the thought. Ostracism for him — Hugh Watson — in Holmes County! For Randolph Watson's son! A wave of hot anger surged over him at the thought.

But that night over his pipe, Watson's mind, ranging in sequacious review each related circumstance, caught the trend of the undercurrent which had escaped him in the heat of his anger. There was a wheel within a wheel, then. A little thing of Evert's? Hardly that. Of Hallett's? Ah — Hallett! Hallett knew, then, that he had blocked him — tried to block him. Rosebud had talked? That was conceivable, of course. He had weighed the possibility of this against other factors which had determined his course of action toward the girl, since that night last June when he had first discovered her position in Mr. Archer's family, and learned later from the girl herself her determination to remain with Betty after Betty's marriage.

"Life's little ironies!" he had said to himself with a grim sigh. "If Betty knew!"

From that day he had set his feet with resolute manliness into the path which led upward to the higher trail. "Honor — Betty — duty," he had outlined his course, naming his incentives in the order in which he saw them; and had then sent for Benson, who came promptly, divided between secret amusement and a due consideration for the liberal payment which he received for his attention to Watson's commands in regard to the girl Rosebud, whom Benson knew as the daughter of one of Watson's clients.

"Rosy 's beginning to feel her oats, Mr. Watson," he said with a grin. "I cayn't do nothing with her, —

nor Lezie cayn't; les'n you are minded to take holt yerself, she 'll hev' to go her own gait. She sez she doan't want no more uv no white man's money as is 'shamed to own her! She 'lows she kin make her own money fum this on. And she sez"— Benson paused to laugh, with vexed humor—"she ain't er goin' to 'sociate with niggers no more, neither—en' she upped and got her er home at Archer's befo' I cud more 'n wink."

Watson listened, his stolid calm unbroken, while within a sick recoil, a cold disgust, wrenched his very soul. Yes; as Benson with plain sense foretold, the time had come when he must "take holt" or let the girl go her own way — which way, by evil chance, had led her into the home of the woman he loved; worse — under the cold, watchful eye of Ben Archer.

"I thought," he said with weary disgust, "that you had found her reasonable — tractable?"

"As good as gold, sir!" answered Benson, and his shrewd, honest face underscored the words. "'T is only sence this other 'nfluence has been working ergin me—"

Hugh swung fiercely upon him. "What do you mean?" he said sternly.

"Mr. Hallett—"

"Hallett? D—— his impudence!"

Benson's hard face showed a flicker of amusement. "Impediment? I ain't never heard it called impediment befo' fur er white man — She 's just er yellow gal, you know, Mr. Watson. Not but she 's er good girl — I ain't nothing to say ergin Rosy — and she 's got more sense than any er her kind ever *I* see; she 's got white folkses' sense, and white folkses' ways, abouten most things; but I ain't never seen it work out different from what this

here 's er working out. When it comes to yallow gals — they 're all alike, and they 're all rotten! En," he went on, tracing with meditative cane the pattern of the office carpet, not lifting his face to Watson's, "en you might stuff 'em with eddication untell they bust, en les'n you kin wipe out that black drop in 'em — 't ain't no good, and 't ain't no use!"

Watson sat like a statue, his hand clinched on the desk in front of him, as the old man's words of homely, irrefutable, stinging truth sank like molten lead into his shrinking consciousness. That black drop, to which Benson referred with unvarnished frankness, seemed to be burning its way through the living tissues of his brain, dropping like an incandescent plummet through to his soul.

"You may be right, Benson," he said at last, rousing himself, "doubtless you are; still, in this case, I feel it my duty — "

"Yer duty to yer client? Ex-actly, sir! And in this case — I doan't say nothing ergin Rosy, mind you — Hallett 's to blame — cuss him! Why, yes, sir," in reluctant assent to a question put by Watson, "it 's pretty well erlong, sir, I should say. Lezie 's er ben er hiding it fum me — they will hide fur each other fum white folkses. Do she care? I think so, Mr. Watson; en she would n't be none to blame, now would she, sir? Rosy ain't nuthen but er colored gal — and he! — What, sir? A-h, naw, naw, sir; 't ain't nuthen on his part but jest th' usual thing. Yes, sir, you 're right about that; he *is* crueler than most; ur he looks it."

Watson walked the length of the room and back, his heavy brows knitted in angry thought.

"Benson," he said at last, and paused; another turn, and then another; "send Rosebud — you call her Rosebud still? Well, send her here to me at this hour tomorrow. Openly, you understand, no skulking; she has a right to come. I have money of hers in my hands. . . . I 'll let you know later."

After the man had left him, he still paced, with restless feet, the narrow confines of his private office, in grim counsel with his most implacable client — his own rebellious soul.

"It is but simple justice," he told himself; "the girl is right. If our positions were reversed, I should take the same stand that she has taken. I have no right, because I pay — no moral right to thrust my wishes upon her, to order her life to suit my own purposes. Our mutual relation does not rest upon a money basis, and she perceives that it does not."

The next day, when the door of his private office opened to admit Rosebud, although Watson had summoned all of his stolid passivity to meet the ordeal, every fiber of his consciousness recoiled, driven back before a wave of sick repulsion under the situation confronting him. Had the girl's fresh and comely figure been the scaled form of a basilisk, he could hardly have shrunk with more horror than he did from her, as she hesitated upon his threshold.

"Come in, Rosebud," he said, using the gentle coldness of his usual manner to her. They had met many times before, the girl knowing him as the lawyer who managed her affairs for the "client" whose name she had never heard.

She remained standing near the door timidly, not meeting the glance Hugh bent upon her, and which, it seemed to him, took cognizance of her for the first time in her life.

The girl was well grown, though her strong, elastic figure retained the soft curves of childhood, which lingered, also, in the tints and contour of her face, as richly colored as a dusky rose. The dark olive of her complexion, coarsened by exposure, deepened upon her cheeks to an indefinite richness of tint which was not rose or scarlet, but a softened mingling of both; the lips of her wide, flexuous mouth were a clear scarlet, and her rich abundance of coarse, chestnut-tinted hair was parted simply above her brow, whose bold, intellectual development was evident at a glance. She had the straight features of her Caucasian ancestry, infused and vivified to a richer exuberance of nature by the warm blood of her mother's race. She did not speak in answer to Watson's greeting, but gazed about her with the unabashed curiosity of a child tempered by a visible awe of Watson.

"Sit down," he said, seeing that she would not speak.
"No, nearer the desk — here."

He pushed a chair toward her, and she sank into it with a frightened glance which he met with a look of keen inspection. She was already on her guard, he saw. Over her frank gaze of a moment before a veil of cold reserve had fallen, as impenetrable as Hugh's own; her rich color had paled a trifle, and, as her features settled into a stolid repose, she bore a strong resemblance to the man who faced her across the desk.

"Mr. Benson tells me, Rosebud," began Watson with blunt directness, "that you prefer to work for your liv-

ing in the future; to make a life for yourself. I have sent for you to know from your own lips if this be true, that I may communicate with my client and learn what his wishes are concerning you."

"I did n't want to live with colored people; I 'd ruther work fur my living then — then that." She spoke timidly, but with an underlying note of firmness which would develop, Hugh felt sure, into obstinacy as her shyness wore off.

"There is no necessity for you to live among negroes if you prefer not. I"—he hesitated a moment and went firmly on—"I thought it best — but let that go." He leaned across the desk, looking keenly, but with the same enforced gentleness, at the girl. "What would you prefer to do with yourself, if you could choose, Rosebud?"

"Stay with Miss Betty, and go to school," she said with smiling promptness.

Hugh started in keen vexation. "That cannot be," he said with harsh decision; "put it at once out of your mind."

She shrunk dismayed at his harsh tone for a moment, but gathered herself together with a gentle dignity, and, looking firmly at him from eyes that matched his own, she said quietly:

"Do it — does it rest with you, Mr. Hugh, to say what I can do? Supposen I breaks off with this — this white gentleman as is your client, and works fur my own living?"

"Did you not know," asked he slowly, "that Miss Archer is to be my wife in January?"

A rosy smile widened Rosebud's flexible lips; she glanced roguishly at Watson. "I knowed you was Miss

Betty's beau. You would n't refuse Miss Betty anything she would ask, would you? And she 's already promised me I shall stay with her after the wedding. What would you say to Miss Betty when she asked why I had to go, Mr. Hugh?"

What, indeed!

"What can I tell this — this client?"

"You know what to tell him, Mr. Hugh," she said persuasively, "er ef you don't, just say I don't want no more er his money — that I can make my own living, and go my own way. I guess," she added with the obstinate smile which Hugh had half-expected to see, "I guess he won't bother none with me."

Watson walked to the window and remained gazing out in silence for a space. "Why are you so set against this man, your father, Rosebud?" he asked, with his face still turned to the window.

"I don't know as I am," she said slowly. "It was only his trying to part me from Miss Betty; and it don't seem fair, nohow, fur him to order me erbout ef — ef he is 'shamed to own me. And I ain't askin' nothin' of him. I don't want nothin' he 's got, but fur him to let me be."

"But if he was willing to own you, as far as he might; if you knew that his plans for you were for your own happiness and good; in short, if he so conducted himself as to convince you that he meant to do what was right by you — not only now, but always — you would obey him, and recognize his right to order your life, as any man has a right to order his daughter's life?"

He stood, with his hand in his trousers pocket, looking sternly down upon her.

"Does you — do you know him, Mr. Hugh?" she said softly.

"Yes."

"Is he er gentleman, er sure-enough gentleman?"

Watson gazed at her fixedly, a streak of red creeping slowly into his pale cheek. "I hope so," he said slowly; "what do you mean?"

"Do he go in style? — is he tony?"

"Oh, that! Yes, I suppose you would call it so."

"But ef he 's 'shamed of me?"

"You do not understand. And yet, you should know. You must know, Rosebud, that there are circumstances, customs, even laws — both written and unwritten — which neither I nor this other man can change, no matter how we might want to, which would prevent his doing for you openly more than he has done. You should be just, child, to this man — try to see how he is placed. He recognizes your claim upon him for care, protection, support; and, if it lay in his power, he would secure happiness for you, I do not doubt. He has done, and he will do, his duty by you as God gives it to him to see it, and as circumstances which he cannot alter allow him; more than this he cannot do."

He stood above her, looking down into his own eyes, which looked back at him in dumb question. He answered the question: "Between you and this man, Rosebud, though you are his daughter, and he is your father, there is the same wall of race — caste — color which has always been between the white race and the negro; which will always be there so long as the world stands and time is, — and which may not be passed. You know what this means; every day you live you see it round you; every

hour that you will live in the future it will be at your elbow."

A voiceless question formed upon her half-opened lips. He answered it: "Yes, it is the color line. And, though you do not remind him of it, that man, your father, passed it."

He dropped into his seat again, leaned over the desk, holding her eyes steadily with his own. "I do not know how far a girl like you can understand, but listen: That was a sin of the flesh, you know, and in the flesh will he repay. But in the spirit, in all those things which belong to his higher nature, you can have no part. Have you understood at all what I mean? He could not love you, cherish you; his very nature would recoil. It is instinct, child, blood!"

A slight trembling seized the girl, her rich color had faded until she was as pale as he.

"Do you see now why you cannot stay with Betty? That it would bring unhappiness, trouble, upon her?"

"Yes, oh, yes," she said breathlessly, "I—I see!"

"You are willing to obey—this man?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Then listen again, Rosebud." Resuming his old gentleness, he entered with patient detail into the sketch of the life he had planned for her: the college in the North, the higher education, the wider life; touching with skilful emphasis upon all that there was in the (to her) unknown life of the mind, of books, culture, travel.

Making her understand that, out of the South, she was free to live any life she might choose with the income which he would settle upon her, he led her gently to see that work—mental work, the broadening, uplifting of the

mind — would lead her upward from the bondage of the flesh that held her here. He talked on and on; and she listened with a tranced interest, with childishly clasped hands and glowing face.

He won her consent without trouble, and she rose joyously to leave him, but he motioned her to her seat.

"There is something else," he said; he paused, settled his collar as though it choked him, but took up resolutely the ugly task. "It is about Mr. Hallett, Rosebud." He was regarding her with stern eyes, but she met them with her impenetrable frankness; it was impossible to read that limpid gaze, to look into the dark corridors of indirection behind it. And Hugh gave it up.

"Mr. Hallett do — I mean does — come sometimes; Lezie say — says he comes to see about his laundry."

"You will not go to Lezie's cabin again; nor leave Mr. Archer's house alone until I am ready to send you off. You will be ready to go by the first of September," he said with brief authority, and she murmured gently, "Yes, Mr. Hugh."

She paused beside his seat, but he did not look up.

"Go now," he said.

"Shall I — shall you — "

"No; Benson will come; Benson will take you; but I will look after everything. It will be *I* you are obeying. You won't forget that?"

"Good-by, Mr. Hugh."

"Good-by."

In the months which had intervened between his interview with her and the coming of September, Watson had perfected his plans for Rosebud's future with patient

thoroughness, looking himself into every detail of her life in the college which he had selected for her with minute, painstaking care; satisfying himself that the environment was really such as tended to develop her intellectually and lay the foundation for the life which he had promised her.

And as the days wore on and his plans fell smoothly into shape, he found that his repugnance to the task had been replaced by a calm satisfaction in the course which he had adopted.

There was about the arrangement of these final details something of the satisfaction with which a man rings down the last penny of a debt, under which he has sweated for years, upon the counter of his creditor, and straightens his back in the serene consciousness that he is his own man again.

The girl herself had evinced no reluctance to meeting his wishes; she had acquiesced with gentle readiness in the arrangements made for her. Benson had reported her happy and interested in the new life opening before her. She had answered Watson's letter embodying his final instructions, with a line through Benson; a stiff, childish note as far as wording and intention, written in a beautiful, ornate hand, but underlaid by the note of firmness which Hugh had detected during his first interview with her, and to which he had unconsciously clung as an anchor to windward in the girl's problematical future.

Then, without warning, had come the amazing check which she had given to his plans for her. Adopting a course infinitely simpler and more effective than argument, or probably futile resistance, she had failed to

keep her appointment with Benson; she slipped from their grasp like the shadow she had been upon Hugh's life.

Through his agent Watson had sought for some trace of her for weeks, but in vain. All that could be ascertained was simply that she had left Adairville at the time, and upon the train designated, and had not arrived at the point where Benson awaited her; that was all.

"Fool!" Hugh had told himself, with a grim laugh. "To think — Lesby's dust — had she lain for a hundred years dead, a grain of her dust could outwit me! I was a fool to forget it!"

Hallett's bold move, the hardly restrained triumph of his tone and glance, had given Watson the first clue as to the girl's disappearance. That suave sentence of a dozen words had done its work with absolute thoroughness. Hallett knew, then, that Rosebud was not in Ohio; and he knew also Hugh's relationship to her.

Plain and simple, with these two facts in his possession, Hallett's game lay before Watson. It was being played with an almost naïve simplicity, and so boldly as to carry assurance that he counted upon success.

Neither Hallett nor General Evert was an antagonist whom a man could afford to underestimate. Watson awarded them a scornful meed of admiration for the deftness of the plot which had entrapped him. Hallett alone would have been a relatively simple problem; but General Evert as a component complicated the conditions.

General Evert's world was Hugh's own; Watson's friends were the General's; his kin the General's kin; through his intimacy with Mr. Archer's family he was woven into Hugh's affairs so inextricably as to be a dan-

gerous factor in anything which touched his relations with the family. Watson set his teeth with keen exasperation as he realized his helplessness. The very inner sanctuary of his affections was open to the old man's coolly speculative eyes—his heart-strings bare to his remorseless manipulation.

Hallett had made a skilful cast, and the loops of the lariat were taut about him. Turn as he would, Hugh felt about his feet the double cord which bound him: Falls and Falls's affairs one strand, and the other, Betty!

To cut loose from Falls's affairs and lend his name to the new company being organized to freeze him—if that were all!

That would be, of course, the form of the demand; but Hugh knew his world too well, had too shrewd a knowledge of the men he dealt with, to suppose for a moment that they would content themselves with aught less than the pound of flesh—weight for weight.

There was, too, the personal equation to be solved with both Hallett and Evert. Hugh recalled the railroad matters of which General Evert had made mention to Hallett, and the bad hour he had put the old man through when he had sweated his nefarious dealings from him on the witness-stand by a process of slow torture comparable to which St. Lawrence's gridiron would have seemed a bed of roses. It was as little likely that the General had forgotten it as that he would forego his revenge.

The real meaning of that demand would be, in brief and brutal terms, to deliver Falls into their hands to be stripped. And the price of his refusal to suborn his honor to his client—Betty.

On the black curtain of that windless winter night

Watson saw, "as in a mirror moving darkly," the brief drama of his love move on, scene after scene, to its bitter finale.

There would be, as Hallett had said, nothing spectacular. Old Ben Archer, that clean-living, self-righteous Presbyterian, would be the instrument of fate. There would be a talk between the two old men, friends of a lifetime, in which there would be no unseemly triumphing upon Evert's part, no faintest hint of any extraneous motive; but with calm ruthlessness, touching this one blotted page in Hugh's otherwise clean record, what facts he had would be placed in Archer's hands, without comment, or, possibly, with a quiet word of warning drawn from the fate of some other woman whom they both knew.

Watson started up under the intolerable smart of the thought. Sooner would he cast Betty under the hoofs of the half-wild cattle which came trooping through each spring and fall from the mountain pastures, and trust to them for mercy, than give her heart and her sweet, unsullied mind into the hands of those two old men, armed with the ruthless righteousness of a sacred duty to perform.

Only of late had he been admitted to the clean, sweet, narrow cell of Betty's mind; and its virgin austerity had at once appalled and charmed him. A hard shudder shook him now as, with prophetic eyes, he saw laid bare under the fierce, white light of her indignant maidenhood the black fungus of that old dead lust. He saw himself in the years of their life together, looking into her clear eyes, knowing that just behind their blue lay the leprosy of this knowledge. . . . God in heaven — no!

Betty's charm for Watson was not in the least a spiritual

or an intellectual one; the girl was neither the one nor the other; she was of the earth — sweetly, unconsciously of the earth, as the blue fringed gentian is of the soil in which it grows.

What he saw in her was the sublimated essence of a perfect physical purity; very human, very womanly, and the exact complement of his own nature. The cool shallows of Betty's nature were refreshment to Hugh's soul; her passionless reserves thrilled him as no other woman's warmth could have done. Her beauty, her calm, charming dullness, the colorless polish of her social bearing, pleased his fastidious taste. He read her mind as he would have read the brief formula of some well-known process couched in plain terms of scientific brevity. Betty's nature was the kind of script whose sense the eye gathers with a glance.

Watson knew that neither imagination nor spiritual elation would color her judgment of him; with Betty always it was

“ . . . the low sun gives the color.”

From the serene heights of an intellectual freedom, and with her power of impersonal abstraction, Joan might forgive — not so Betty.

A more spiritual woman than Betty, uncomprehending, might forgive utterly; but Betty had the kinship with earth which would reveal, interpret to her with every eloquent tongue in nature the crime against her — against their mutual love — of which he stood confessed.

No merciful uncertainty tempered the pitiless logic of Watson's reasoning; his despairing eyes sought for no rainbow of hope spanning the mists of Betty's tears.

The storm would pass; her eyes would smile again in their clear, unchanging blue—but for others, never again for him. He knew the swift recoil of race and blood and caste, the physical repulsion, the pitiless scorn and hate which is written, as he himself had defined it for Falls, “in the very blood and bones, the fiber of the mind, the texture of the soul,” of the white people of the South against the negro race. Had it not risen up and choked him over and over again; did it not throb in him now with sick disgust and horror!

Watson was a clever lawyer, a great criminal lawyer; for years he had tracked human passions as African hunters track the soft-footed beasts of the jungles. Countless times he had seen the sweat of anguish break out on lip and forehead of some man stretched upon the rack of his pitiless examination; he had watched the dumb writhing of the tortured soul under his calm vivisection, as his probe sank deeper, searching for that gangrened spot so decently covered from the sight of the world,—so safe under the spotless reputation.

God! had it hurt like this? Had those poor devils, while he broke them upon the wheel, seen some woman’s eyes looking into those hidden places of their hearts laid bare under his scalpel? Had they seen, as he was seeing now, the angel-light in those eyes go out, quenched by that black drop which he had probed for—and found? Watson bared his head to the cold air of midnight that hung motionless about him; no sound of human life reached him, though he was in the very heart of the town.

Alone with himself as under the action of an alchemistic draft, mind and substance separated; Watson, the

man, stood humbly before the mind, and sued for counsel — respite.

From the oak-tree came a sound of dumb straining; and to Watson it seemed the sound of his own striving. In the very core of the darkness, which seemed to flow off from his figure in waves, his brain was awake; back and forth it wove, seeking amid the tangled web of circumstance the master knot which held the whole. It must be there!

Hallett played with loaded dice, Watson felt sure. The coercive note in the invitation to join the Cumberland Gas Company, the veiled threat in old Evert's manner — all was plain now, and all pointed inexorably to the possession of material proof. Not again would Hugh underestimate Hallett as an adversary.

The question was now simply what he held. Rosebud's word? The drifting leaves afloat upon the midnight air would weigh as much with any one whom Hallett would desire to influence.

Narrowed to its ultimate conclusion, the letter stared Watson in the face. That fatal moment of yielding to his self-imposed duty of restitution! That signature — no extenuation could touch it; no palliation lessen its damning evidence!

Watson rose at last from his dark seat, stiff and cold, and his mind, so long bent to the tension of intense thought, sprung back to the normal with a snap. He laughed as he stretched his stiffened muscles.

“‘Be good if you can be good; but if you can’t, be careful.’ What is left me? There are, then: finesse, which in this case means plain burglary — pah! brute force — and Falls!” A sudden warmth, a thrill of hope, shot

through the man's tired frame as the thought of Falls came to him.

Almost it was as though Falls had reached from out the dank cold of the wintry dawn and grasped him with a warm, firm hand, leading him back to life and manhood again.

XI

ALIEN!

DECEMBER'S peevish sulks soon wore off, and the lovely shrew smiled again, a chill, radiant smile from a sky like clear, blue ice, under which the valley of the Tennessee glittered like a jeweled flower from end to end.

From the car-window, as the long trip back to Alabama neared its end, Falls marked its icy smile with bitter eyes. A cold repugnance to Adairville and its people had seized upon him. He strove in fierce revolt against the meshes of the net about him, yet honor, duty, business integrity, the very forces of his own unbending nature, held him to his purpose; every tough, inflexible, fighting instinct in the man rose and armed itself to the unequal fight—a fight in which he stood opposed not alone to Adairville and its twenty thousand people, but to the crowding ranks of importunate memories. The town saw in Falls's bold, assertive presence, heard in his masterful tones, the incarnate spirit of the power which had oppressed them, pillaged them, drenched their land in blood and tears, and broken the proudest spirit on earth.

But there was mutiny in Falls's own ranks. If his revolt against the meshes of circumstance had been fierce, his revolt against himself had been fiercer yet. Again and again in those weeks of turmoil which had succeeded

upon the attempt to ruin him by the treacherous wrecking of his machinery, the thought of Joan had come to him, and again and again had he thrust it savagely away. She was a part of the town; of the people who hated him — whom he hated; they were her friends, her kindred, and he? He was alien to it and — to her. Madness, folly, weakness, to dream it could be otherwise. Suppose he could tear her from them — bind her to his own heart — would it not be the old losing fight of the individual against the type — the transient flame of human passion opposed to an unswerving natural law, the force of racial instinct?

His tired nerves revenged themselves cruelly upon him during the enforced quiet of the railway journey, for the unremitting strain of the past weeks. Over and over he lost himself in dreams of Joan, — her lips, her eyes, her warm breath on his cheek, — only to lash himself anew into harsh scorn for his puerile folly. And Watson's proffered friendship? As Falls saw it now, it was of a piece with the town. He would have none of it.

Noon of the next day found Falls in his office at the power-house, with a pile of mail before him, which, with the aid of a gasping stenographer at his side, he was reducing to two orderly piles of letters, one for the mail and the other for the file. His eyes, sweeping the valley road upon the mountainside, caught a glint of sunlight upon the burnished flank of a bright bay horse which carried a slender figure; a gleam of gold showed beneath the riding-hat; there was a familiar turn of the graceful head.

Cummings, with his pencil suspended, awaited the last

curt sentence of the letter; but he heard instead the rattle of the telephone as Falls snatched it from its rest:

"Robinson's livery-stable, please. . . . Falls—send my horse out right away; and, Mat—that you? All right; if you get him here in ten minutes there will be a dollar for you with Cummings."

"Ah,—Cummings," said Falls to the stenographer, "er—I'm a little pressed for time this afternoon; just leave this mail over."

And Cummings, discreetly blind to the picture still in full view from the window, slowly climbing the mountain road, hoped Mr. Falls would have a pleasant ride.

"Cummings is inside—three minutes to spare, thank you, Mat." Falls swung himself into the saddle, looked behind to see that the road was clear of spectators, and put the black horse straight at the board fence which separated the street from the open common; riding across country, he took rail-fences and gullies as they showed up, in an air line for the mountain road.

Mat, his dollar rattling in solitary grandeur in his baggy breeches-pocket, grinned his admiration, and turned a leering eye upon Cummings.

"Ain't that er Miss Jone 'Dair? What 's Falls er chasing after her fur? Do she look at him enny?"

"Naw," said Cummings in magnificent disdain, "he 's just wasting his time. She 's the toniest girl in town; she would n't have nuthen' to do with no d—— Yankee!"

With tender solicitude for her beautiful terra-cotta bay, Joan was allowing him to climb the steep road at his own sweet will, the reins loose upon his neck.

From the crest of the first hill she could see the buildings of the power plant, a crude blotch of color against

the dull green of the belt of cedars intervening. She smiled as her eyes lingered upon their bare, hideous outline, thinking of how much those jumbled masses had come to mean to her, infused as they seemed to be with Falls's own strong personality. Falls and his plant had come to be indissolubly linked together in her mind. She had watched the duel between him and his crippled plant against the town with breathless interest and a partisanship which each day grew more shyly tender. She awoke at night and listened for the panting of his engines across the hill, with his face before her on the black curtain of the night. Falls had scarcely been absent from her mind since the night she had told him she was on his side—the side of fair play and the best man. And she was thinking of him as she rode.

At the top of the first wide step to the mountain Joan settled herself more firmly in her saddle, and gave Ritchie a tiny love-lick across his shining flank. At the same moment there was a clatter of hoofs behind her, and she half-turned her head.

“Who’s coming, Ritchie? Whoa, I say, *whoa*, sir!—Till I see—”

Falls waved his cap to her in gay salute, and a moment after ranged the black horse beside Ritchie, regardless of the latter’s superciliously arched neck and curling lip.

“I did n’t know you were home,” she said; her radiant eyes, her smiling lips, the joyous lilt in her voice, all bidding him be glad he was.

“‘Home,’ ” thought Falls in grim commentary, while she went on:

“I could not think who it could be coming at such

a pace. Why, I would n't even dr-e-a-m of asking Ritchie to get out of a walk over that bit of road, and this big, lovely fellow did n't even turn a hair!"

"Ritchie is a lady's pet — a spoiled darling. Joe knew when he came to me that, if he was to carry me, it meant work."

"Are you riding for exercise, or are you going somewhere?" Joan asked as the horses settled to the next rise.

"I 'm going somewhere — I suppose. You seem to be headed for somewhere. I 'm going wherever you are going."

There was a light in Falls's handsome eyes which Joan had never seen there before, and his grave lips were smiling.

"I 'm going to the mountain house to look after things a little," she informed him with a businesslike air that amused Falls, although his face, turned to her, was discreetly grave as he listened. "Father likes the house kept in order, so if any time he fancies going up for a week, it will be ready. So every little bit I ride up, just to let Lethe know that I have an eye upon her and what she would call her 'goings on.'"

The horses climbed with strong, easy strides the steep road that, twisting like a snake, ran along the mountain-side between stunted cedars and masses of cool gray rocks. The girl bravely kept up her light chatter, though the mute language of Falls's steady eyes was wakening the sleepy roses in her cheeks more effectively than the bracing air had done.

She was telling him brightly of the approaching Christmas gaieties, including him tacitly, with gentle tact,

in it all; confiding to him with her sweet matter-of-factness the "times" she was having with the preparations for her own Christmas party.

"I mailed your card —" Her eyes questioned him.

"Thank you, yes; I have it here —" Falls touched the pocket of his coat, meeting her eyes with a look of tender gravity.

He would not come. In the reticence of his glance Joan read the refusal which Falls's lips would not utter; and a wave of disappointment, of pity, of generous indignation, rose in her throat in a choking sob. He meant to cut himself off, then, before . . . Joan looked straight ahead, a sudden mist of tears blotting out the white road. . . . And she had thought he did not know, did not care. She knew now how well he knew, and how much he cared!

Falls had seen the mist in the lovely eyes, the sob climb up in the girl's white throat, while he fought down the impulse to tell her all; to tell her that he cared only because it kept him from her.

"I 'm coming to the Dixie Club ball," he said gently, at last; and, leaning over, he stroked Ritchie's shoulder with a strong caress. "That is, I am coming if it is plainly understood between us now that I am to have a waltz, a whole one? I hate those fragmentary waltzes. — Yes?"

"Yes; and a whole one."

"And one later?"

Joan demurred. Falls was firm. "No tag-end! I want it all to myself and until the music stops."

"I 'll tell you," said Joan, "I 'll bet you the second one that Ritchie can beat Joe to the second toll-gate."

"Done!" cried Falls. "Till the music stops?"

"Till the music stops."

A smooth road as hard as asphalt lay before them for half a mile unbroken by an obstacle, and slightly inclining downward to the next abrupt ascent, at the bottom of which lay the second toll-gate.

"Make Joe toe the line. The shadow of that limb; no fudging!" cried Joan gaily, backing Ritchie until his reluctant fore feet rested upon the bar of shade which fell across the road.

"Shall I give you a length or two?" asked Falls, magnificently disdainful, though his quick glance had measured Ritchie's racing points with misgiving.

"Perish the thought! No, indeed; I'm going to beat you, fair field and no favor. One, two, three!"

Side by side for the first hundred yards the two horses swept down the incline, Ritchie willing enough to exert himself, now that there was a man and a horse to look on,—to make it worth his while,—in fact, leading by half a head. The keen air, straight in their faces, sang past their ears. The landscape was a painted panorama of purple peaks and misty ranges, of stiff, dark cedars and swaying pine-tops, the whole revolving about them with a noiseless rush. The white road flowed backward from the horses' pounding hoofs like a white ribbon unrolled from the peaks ahead of them.

Ritchie was leading half a length when a third of the distance had been traversed. Joan could see the clear red of Joe's straining nostril level with her shoulder. A second later Falls's hand upon the rein came into sight, then a bit of his gray sleeve. He was gaining. Falls was riding hard, in grim earnest, putting the black horse

up to all he knew, trusting to the laziness of the petted darling, which Joan rode, to give him the race in the end.

And Falls was right. Almost at the moment when the black horse begun to forge ahead, Joan felt beneath her her horse's slackening muscles.

What was the good, Ritchie had decided within himself, of this unseemly haste? He could beat that black brute; he knew it, and Joe was a fool if he did not know it, also. Was not that enough? It seemed that it was not, and to the end of his days Ritchie never forgot that bit of specious reasoning.

Joan, his tender, his solicitous mistress, the dispenser of loaf-sugar and kisses,—incredible, amazing!—was laying her riding-whip across those sacred, shining flanks of his in such vigorous persuasion as made Falls sway in his saddle with laughter to see.

Amazed, indignant, smarting under the indignity of the lash and the pain of the blows, Ritchie gathered his supple body together in a bound like a stag's, stretching his dainty racer's head and supple length along the ground until his red-gold body skimmed the road like a firebrand carried swiftly through the night.

For the remaining distance to the goal he left Joe behind him by three times his own length.

The rush through the cold air had been like wine in Falls's veins; his dark cheek showed a streak of color, his somber eyes were alight with the joy of the hour.

He stood beside her laughing, the care-free laughter of a boy, holding out his hand in congratulation. Joan struck her slender gauntlet across his palm with the frank emphasis of good-fellowship.

"Was n't it glorious? And is n't Ritchie a p-e-rfect d-a-rling!" Joan leaned from her saddle and flung both arms about the horse's arching neck in a hug of sweet abandon. And Ritchie turned his graceful head aside, deprecating such public demonstration, in his embarrassment nipping Joe viciously.

The sun was warm on their shoulders, the murmurous sounds of the pines like an organ note underlying the lighter sounds of the winter woods about them. A flight of wild geese passed overhead, traveling south in wedge-shaped formation.

"That is a good sign," said Joan; "it means cold weather. I hate a muggy Christmas—don't you?"

"Yes. . . . You broke into my confidences about the Dixie Club ball with our race. Did you intend to prevent my asking you to let me go with you — purposely? I am afraid I am late, but if by any happy chance you are disengaged —"

"But I am not!" she said gently. "'Prevent you'? What nonsense! I should have been ch-a-rmed, simply ch-a-rmed! But Mark Caldwell, a friend of Hugh's, is here; in fact, he came all the way from New Orleans on purpose. He is Alabama's Chief Justice, you know, and — very well worth while, in spite of it. I made the engagement quite a bit ago." She spoke eagerly, as though to take the sting out of her refusal by showing how completely it had been out of her power to go with him.

Falls leaned over to her horse to tighten the girth.

"Mr. Caldwell is quite welcome to his innings," he said coolly. "I have to-day." He was quite close to her as he slipped the strap through and pushed hard home the buckle. He looked deep into her eyes, his own grave

again and a little somber, as he finished speaking: "I would not give this for a dozen balls — would you?"

The last two words were uttered low and wistfully. His nearness agitated her. Already to-day she had been dangerously near self-betrayal; she had just refused him his request, understanding, too, all the circumstances that had led him to make it, sympathizing keenly with him in the manly stand he was taking against the town which meant to ostracize him; dreading for him, she knew not why, the ordeal of the Dixie Club ball. It was impossible to refuse this one drop of balm to his heart.

"No," she whispered, and, rallying instantly, added serenely: "I prefer out-of-doors always; I like the open air more than any indoor amusement."

"Really, you know," she went on after a moment of silence, "really, it is Betty's place to go with Mr. Caldwell — as Hugh's fiancée; he is Hugh's college chum. But Buckley Shirley, you know! He was Betty's cousin, or something — Betty is kin to half the town; it is often — er — inconvenient."

"Buckley Shirley?" echoed Falls. "I seem to know the name but I can't place it — "

"He is Lanier Shirley's son; the banker, you know? And — he is the man who threw Will-Henry off the car that day — "

"Ah — that roistering young cub! What has he been doing now that Miss Archer must stop away from the ball?"

Falls was speaking lightly, and Joan looked at him with grave surprise.

"Have n't you heard? Oh, I had forgotten; you have been away. When did you get in, Mr. Falls?"

Falls was puzzled by her gravity, but answered directly: "At daylight this morning. I slept until noon, and lunched in my room and went on to the office without seeing any one but the waiter who served me."

"Buckley has been murdered —"

"Murdered?"

"Yes," said Joan gravely, "murdered! It was p-e-r-fectly shocking! Such a grief to his family; they are lovely people."

She paused, flushing under the glance of quiet irony which Falls turned upon her, but meeting his glance steadily with her own. "I know — what you mean, and I do not defend Buckley. He was a grief to his family; but they feel this all the more because of that. The Shirleys are kin to half the State, and we all — all their friends — feel deeply for them; the whole town is excited —"

Falls laughed with rasping scorn, and, raising his whip, cut sharply at an unoffending weed upon the roadside. "More hysterics? I have never before encountered a community so subject to 'nerves' as the Adairville public."

They rode in silence for a minute; the sharp clicking of the horses' feet upon the rocky road, a far-off call for cattle in the valley at their feet alone breaking the silence. They were almost upon the summit of the long "razor-backed" ridge before Falls spoke again.

"Buckley Shirley," he said with level-voiced deliberation, "was the most consummate scoundrel that I have ever met; he was too vile for human belief — almost. It shocks me beyond words to hear his name upon your lips. . . . If he has met the fate which beyond question he merited, why should it concern me, or any other decent

man? Let the courts look to it that his murderer is punished, if they can convict him. Why, in the name of reason and common sense, should public opinion go into spasms over it?"

Falls looked back, as he finished speaking, to where, far below, Adairville lay in her nest of low, green hills, wrapped in the blue haze of distance like a city in a dream. To the south the river curved like a silver simitar between her and the world; while above the veil of mist, suspended between the blue of earth and the blue of heaven, the great cross upon the spire of the church of "The Brotherhood of Christ" hung like a covenant.

Falls raised his whip and pointed to it with a smile of cutting scorn: "'Put ye on the whole armor of righteousness!'—Adairville is panoplied with cross and sworn to enforce the 'brotherhood of Christ.'"

As Falls let fall his arm, Joan leaned from her saddle and laid her gloved hand upon it with quietly imperative grasp. The color had slipped from her cheeks.

"Are you mad?" she cried, in a low, tense voice. "Promise—promise me here—that you will not say those dreadful things again. Those things about Buckley and Adairville!"

There was appeal, almost anger in her eyes. And Falls remembered, with swift remorse, how much this might mean to her. This was her home; these people were her friends—her kin, for all he knew.

"I'm a brute," he cried, and grasped in his own the hand that still rested trembling, insistent, upon his sleeve.

She drew her hand from his with quiet decision; and once more Ritchie felt that keen lash across his shining

flanks, as she sent him on far in advance of Falls and Joe.

Ritchie absolutely refusing to mend his snail's pace at the next rise, Falls overtook them, and leaning over laid his hand firmly upon Joan's rein.

"You are not going to run away from me again," he said quietly, in answer to her indignant glance. "Not until I know that you have forgiven me, that you are not angry with me! Really, I had no idea I was such a vindictive brute!"

"Angry? Of course I 'm not angry," Joan said serenely. "Ah, here is the gate of my castle!" she added, waving her hand toward the wide iron gates that Falls now dismounted to open. The gates led into an open lawn or a series of lawns stretching away upon one side to the brow of the range, upon the other to the woods, and buried just now beneath a brilliant blanket of drifted leaves, which kept up a continual whirling, ghostly dance about the horses' feet.

Falls captured a handful of the painted fugitives and passed them up to Joan, who selected one of fuchsia-tinted purple and red for her own coat, and, leaning from her saddle, gave Falls back a maple-leaf which glowed a clear scarlet from tip to stem. She sat in her elevated seat and gravely contemplated the effect of it in his buttonhole with lifted chin and lowered lashes—as though he had been a dress pattern of a particularly difficult shade.

"You are too dark to wear gray," she pronounced at last, still surveying him with serene, abstracted eyes,— "too dark for unrelieved gray, you know. With a dash of color, now, you m-i-ght venture."

This was the phase in which Falls found the girl most charming; but he did not speak in answer; he did not even smile; but in his grave face, lifted to her own, was epitomized the whole immortal message of sex. Alone in the still reaches of this upper world, the girl had cast off, as though it had been a too elaborate garment, the suave polish of her every-day manner, and was sweetly, frankly woman.

They had crossed the ridge, and the long, narrow valley—cove, Joan called it—upon the other side of the range lay before them.

"This is Lost Cove." Joan pointed with her whip. "Those mountains across there bound Dixie on the north; all beyond is Yankee-land." She turned her laughing eyes on Falls. "Don't you pine for your own land?"

"Not now; all that I pine for now is on this side of the Cumberlands."

"But when you have made your pile—"

"If I could take my—my treasure, you know, with me—"

"Ah!" Joan laughed lightly, "that is what all the Yankees do. They come to Alabama, or to Mississippi, or Texas—anywhere, and 'realize their capital,' and then go back to the North to spend it."

"I should not spend mine," Falls said slowly.

"Not—?"

"No; I should hoard it—cherish it!" Falls leaned upon Joe's strong shoulder, looking off across the cove to where range after range receded into the sky-line, with wisps of pearly vapor clinging to their sides.

"Lambs of the sky," said Joan, pointing them out to Falls; "they will go to bed directly; they sleep over

there on 'Coon Top. I 've seen them go to bed lots of nights and get up lots of mornings. And they are dreadfully, dreadfully lazy some mornings! I 've known them to stay cuddled up there all day long. . . . Oh, Lethe, is that you? Come in, Mr. Falls, while I decide what I will do with you while Lethe and I transact business."

In the end she took him with her, and together they visited every nook and cranny of the small farm, Falls making himself useful with his deft strength, showing a matter-of-fact interest in every detail of its management which rivaled Joan's own.

It had grown colder as the afternoon advanced, and a great fire of hickory logs was suffusing the hall with dancing, rosy light when they reached it. Joan dropped a little wearily into a chair in the pleasant warmth, and drew off her stiff hat.

"If I only had something to eat, I should be at peace with the world! Are not you dying of hunger, Mr. Falls?"

"I 'm hungry," Falls conceded, "but I might make it back to town —"

"Le-the!" called Joan plaintively, "is there anything here to eat?"

"Des cawn-pone," said Lethe, appearing, seemingly materialized from the shadows at the rear of the hall.

"Good!" cried Falls, "I love it!"

"What else, Lethe?"

"An' sweet 'taters."

"Food for the gods! We 'll roast them in the ashes —"

"Des already cooked," said Lethe, reprovingly; "I 'se dun cooked um wid de possum."

"Possum! Oh, Lethe! this is too del-i-cious!" cried Joan rapturously. "A possum supper!"

Fatigue forgotten, she flung off her riding-coat, pinned up her habit, and went lightly about the preparations for supper; to and fro from kitchen to dining-room and back to the hall, where the table was set and supper was to be served in the glow of the roaring log-fire.

"Can't I help?" asked Falls.

"No; you may play about till supper is ready. I'll call you."

When she called him a few minutes later, Falls returned from the gallery, bearing aloft upon his shoulder a laughing, crowing, brown piccaninny, whose roly-poly form was clad in a brief red garment, and a pair of immense gold earrings.

She was a pretty creature, like the warm, furry, brown things one finds in the woods in winter, whose bright eyes shine with shy friendliness as they vanish down a hollow log or an opening in the dark earth.

She sat securely upon Falls's broad shoulder, serenely unabashed, one chubby brown fist grasping his immaculate locks,—whose parting had constrained even Betty's reluctant admiration!—her white milk teeth shining in a wide smile of universal friendship, her eyes like black flowers glowing with mirth as she sought among the shadows in the lower hall for her mother.

"See what I have, Miss Adair! I found it out there rolling about in the leaves. Here, sit still, you little Hindoo god!" The tot upon his shoulder had begun to hammer her pink heels upon his chest in a lively tattoo at the sight of the flames. "Is n't she a dream of a 'coon baby?"

He advanced, as he spoke, within the circle of fire and lamplight, tossing the little creature into the air and catching her strongly, while she laughed her gurgling laugh of sheer rapture, her great eyes shining. Joan did not answer, and Falls, smiling broadly, turned toward her.

Joan stood motionless beside the table, her slight figure drawn haughtily to its full height and rigid with amazed disgust. In her eyes, resting upon Falls's face, was a dawning fear and pain, a piteous appeal to him against himself, mingled with indignant protest against this affront to her.

The uncomprehended anguish of her eyes pierced Falls like a rapier, and he lowered the child mechanically to his arm, holding her carelessly in his strong grasp as he might a kitten.

Lethe emerged swiftly from the shadows of the hall with soft, thudding steps. With instant comprehension, she took the situation at once in hand with the inimitable tactfulness of her race.

"Lawd Gawd A'might, *Ad-lade*, wut yu' doing in dat w'ite gemmen's lap? Jes' yu' gin 'er to her mammy, sur!" She took the baby from Falls's unconscious grasp and spanked her softly, with a gust of silent laughter.

"Dish 'er de forwa'dest nigger on dis yearth! *I* dunno w'ut I'se gine do wid 'er!" A turn of her eye showed Joan to her, busy at the table in the dining-room beyond; she laid her fat brown hand on Falls's sleeve with a soothing pat; he might have been ten years old and she about to soothe some childish woe with a stolen cookie.

"Doan yu' fret yo'se'f nun, honey! Lethe gine to

'plain dish 'er sit'cheration. Yu' never meant no harm; 'tis jis' yo' Yankee ways; but *dey*," she motioned backward to the dining-room and Joan, "dey cayn't *bide* no sich!" She smiled a wide, toothless smile of amiable derision. "Dey ain't never larnt — wid all *dey* knows bouten niggers — dat de black won't rub off on 'em! Yu' g' long 'n' ex'cise yo'se'f on de gal'ry some befo' supper. Lethe gine 'plain to Miss Jone."

Falls strode the length of the gallery and back, and back again, his hands clasped together behind him, his head bent in thought; he was conscious of a dull ache, a baffled, spiritless pain unlike the fierce tumult of his anger after the accident to his plant, when he had sought to put the girl out of his heart. This was different — inexplicable.

"What is this thing thrusting itself between us?" he mused hotly. "She has been so near me to-day! Yet twice it has come between us; I saw it in her eyes out there on the hill."

"No," he said with a sharp intake of his breath, "no; this is not nerves — it goes deeper; there is reason behind it — something I do not know. But I will know! There was fear in her eyes both times — fear for me."

He turned back to the door, and met her upon the threshold, carrying a great platter of brown loaves.

"Supper?" he asked gaily, with a resolute adoption of his usual manner.

"Yes; I was coming for you."

Upon the dainty table, set forth upon faultless damask and served in exquisite china, was the simple fare Lethe had promised. The possum, like a wee, wee pig, reposed in a nest of golden yams dripping with butter, upon the

platter in front of Falls; and upon a corresponding one in front of Joan was a pile of golden-brown corn dodgers, rich and flaky, with the prints of Lethe's supple fingers upon their tops.

"That marks them sterling," Joan explained. "Corn dodgers which are smooth on top are an infringement upon the patent,—fraudulent imitations unworthy the name."

The little feast went rather gravely on. Falls ate his possum with the appetite which the ride in the cold air had given him, but the racy, wild flavor of the little woodland creature might have been the tamest of domestic fowls for all the cognizance his palate took of it. The quiet hour, the ruddy hearth; the girl opposite him, in her simple, unconventional dress, with bright hair, loosened by the ride, about her face, which was softened and pensive with fatigue; the close, warm intimacy of the moment filled Falls as with a draught of drugged wine. He answered mechanically her desultory talk, while in the background of his mind he dreamed an intoxicating dream of love,—a longing dream of home.

"You shall have your coffee with all possible elegance," said Joan, as they rose from the table, "to atone for any slight deficiency in the viands." And she served him herself from a beautiful old silver urn, in a cup of egg-shell china of clear Nankeen yellow, with a humming-bird poised for a handle.

Presently Joan rose and looked about for her coat, calling to Lethe.

"Not yet!" Falls pleaded, his watch in his hand. "I have been making this calculation for an hour past. See, it will take only thirty or forty minutes to ride down; it will be quite light still—"

"An' de moon 's bright ez day," said Lethe from the doorway.

"Just a minute, then," consented Joan, and sank into the long chair which Falls was heaping with cushions for her. "I really am dreadfully tiud — tired, I mean," as Falls laughed.

"Rest a bit, then — and then I 'll take you down and give you up to them."

"To whom, if you please? Whom are you proposing to turn me over to, — the authorities?"

"Your people," he answered steadily; "my hour is over."

"Don't think it," Joan cried with forced lightness; "and while it is still with us, Mr. Falls, I — I rather wanted to speak — to finish speaking — about Buckley Shirley."

Falls shifted his position slightly so as to interpose his shoulder between her face and the too ardent glow of the fire. Leaning across the low arm of her chair, he could see that her eyes were troubled still.

"I want to give you the details of poor Buck's — Ah, let me call him that *now!* We were tiny tots together — Buck and I. Do you remember a tall, rather tumbled-down old brick house on the left of Jeff Davis Avenue, Mr. Falls?"

"I think so."

"It used to be a school. We all went there as we came on — even in Hugh's day it was there; and Buck Shirley and I came on together. I can see myself now. I wore long aprons down to the bottom of my frock, and a long plait down my back. Buck used to call me 'fraid-cat' and make me cry, but I admired him beyond any-

body. He was a quaint creature. He could make all sorts of wonderful things that would go, you know,— mills that went round, and railroad cars that could run along the desks. . . . I want to tell you before any one else can—before you go back to town."

Falls started in sharp surprise; and she took his strong wrist into the clasp of one of her hands and held him firmly while she went on speaking: "There may be nothing in what I am going to say; I have wondered if I ought to speak at all—"

"This has been troubling you all afternoon," said Falls gently. "Best pass it on to me; that will get it off of your mind."

"Well, you see it was like this: Buckley was murdered — killed by two men near that cane-brake on the road to Lintonia. I don't know how they know, but every one seems to know that he was set upon. They say it was a plot."

"Well? The millennium does not yet reign in Alabama. Have not men been assassinated in Holmes County before?"

"But they think it was Will-Henry, Mr. Falls. It was Buckley who threw him off the car. . . . The negroes have been secretly excited all along over that affair, and now this murder —"

Falls was listening now, absorbed in thought, and unconscious for the moment that the light touch upon his wrist had been withdrawn. "I see," he said at last quietly; "have any arrests been made? What circumstance directed suspicion to Will-Henry, other than the fact that he is a negro, and because of the street-car matter?"

"Some one saw him slinking about in Blackbird Hollow at Melindy's cabin several days before."

"Is that all—is that all the evidence they have against the poor devil? No jury on earth would—"

Joan sat upright among her pillows with wide, startled eyes fixed on Falls. "Jury?" she echoed, a trembling smile touching her lips for a second. "What was it Hugh called you that night at Hillcrest—so long ago now?"

"'An innocent Yankee,' was it not?"

"Yes, and you are, too. There are hundreds of men out hunting Will-Henry. They have bloodhounds with them—" Joan shivered in the warm glow of the hearth.

"If they catch him," she went on gravely, "they will not stop to try him; they will just hang him without any judge or jury or—or anything,—a mob, you know."

"Lynch him?" inquired Falls grimly. "I've read of such things. Yet it is simply incredible that such things as one reads of could happen here, in Adairville. A remote country village might let itself lapse into barbarism temporarily; but hardly a town the size of this; with courts and with men of influence—men who are known outside of Alabama—resident here."

"But such men are only one or two against the whole of Holmes County."

"Does Holmes County take a hand also?"

"They are far, far worse than the townspeople; more ignorant and more prejudiced against the negroes."

"Naturally, as they have more to do with them. You are suspiciously well up in mob etiquette yourself, it seems to me. Surely nothing like this has happened in your day?"

"Since I can remember," she answered slowly, a sudden pallor whitening her lips and cheeks, "since I can remember there have been five men hung by mobs right here in Adairville — in the court-house yard, in the very center of town — two of them white men!"

"What insane folly allowed a tender child like you to know such things?" cried Falls sternly.

"Hugh was out of town, and father did not know; and when I passed through town on my way to school, they were hanging still,—three of them,—stiff and stark, all bloody, to a tree! They had shot them, you know, after — after —"

Joan was trembling at the gruesome memory and by her new terror for him.

Falls bent pitifully over her. This, then, was the specter which had haunted her all afternoon.

"Don't!" he pleaded, "don't think of such horrors. They cannot touch your life,—those you love,—drive them from your mind." With her clinging hand safe in his own broad palm, Falls bent over Joan, arguing gently with her, pointing out the improbability of any trouble resulting from Will-Henry's capture.

"They may find the guilty man, you know, and Will-Henry go free. There will be no danger to me. I am not a helpless negro without friends or money. I could not be jerked up without a trial —"

"What could you do against three hundred men, armed, — in the dark night, — and you all alone?"

Falls laughed grimly. "I think I might account for a dozen or two of the stuff that Alabama mobs are made of.

"I 'm going to take you home now," he added; "the

air, the motion, will give you back your nerve. But one question, first — if I may?"

She met his eyes steadily; hers were full of trouble, but they did not falter. "I know what it is," she said quietly, "but — yes, ask it."

"It is better to thrash it all out now, while we are on the subject, and then forever and a day forget it. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps," she murmured doubtfully.

"Tell me" — Falls's deep voice was scarcely above a whisper, and there trembled through it a caressing note which wooed her, and woke her to fresh sorrow at once — "tell me why were you so startled, pained, when I rode the brown baby on my shoulder? . . . No," he said, gently firm, "no temporizing. Tell me all — or tell me that you will not tell me anything."

Flushed and distressed, Joan felt at bay under his eyes, which held her like a spell. As she looked into the face bending over her, proud, manly, tender, — the high-bred, cool abstraction of his ordinary bearing betrayed even in the stress of the moment, — she flushed with shame at the thought of the cruel injustice which she had done him when, in the grip of the fierce repulsion of race prejudice, she had seen in his simple act a distorted shadow of the grim bogey, that lifelong training and centuries of prenatal influences had wrought like an atavism into the very fabric of her brain. She struggled to find words of explanation — of apology; words with which to make him understand that it was not she who had condemned him, but a something which lived within her; words to describe the uncontrollable physical repulsion — born in her blood, nurtured in her mind, and breathed in with the

air that nourished her — which was yet not her conscious will nor active intelligence.

If he could only know — if she could but make him understand — the horror which had gripped her like a vise when he had betrayed that he did not share her prejudice of color — of caste, did not feel the physical repugnance which she herself felt, and the lack of which she had been reared to regard with loathing, he would forgive her. . . . She must — must try to tell him.

Joan had recovered, almost at once, her mental poise, which had been so roughly shaken under the recoil of instinct and habit of thought. Her mind had found swift excuse for Falls's act, had ranged in order every fact in his defense; she knew intuitively what must be his mental attitude to this thing which had so distressed her.

Falls, reading her face as it were an open page, felt the dull ache come back to his heart, the cold mist which he could not thrust away creeping in between them again. "Alien!" he said to himself in bitter thought — "alien!"

Joan spoke at last, in a whisper, and Falls bent his ear to catch it. "I cannot — cannot tell you," she sobbed. "I should die of shame!"

"You need not," he said gently; "you need not — I know!"

XII

WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CLERGY

THE clerk handed Falls a note from Hugh, on his arrival at the hotel after his ride to the mountain.

"I've been trying to get on your trail all day," it read, "I've traveled miles in elevators chasing you!"

"I must see you at once. Better come to my place to-night on your way in."

"Hugh."

Watson's sitting-room was comfortably filled with smoke as Falls entered, and Hugh, flanked and buttressed by orderly piles of papers plainly untouched, sat at his desk. He was wearing his glasses, and greeted Falls with a genial smile of welcome.

Falls's chair was ready, his favorite pipe and tobacco-jar conveniently near. He dropped into his chair, filled his pipe and lighted it. Then he leaned back with a sigh of content, puffing abstractedly.

Hugh's gaze, searching and oddly without humor, roused him at last, and he turned toward him with a smile: "Well?"

Falls started in amazement. "You 've been ill, Charlie?"

"No," said Hugh, his eyes upon the papers which he sorted methodically — unseeingly, "not ill in the way

you mean; yet ill enough, God knows, if it comes to that!"

Falls brought down his hand with earnest emphasis upon the arm of his chair. "I knew there was something wrong. But I thought it was with me—my vexatious affairs, as usual. I see it is with you, Hugh?"

He leaned forward, his pipe in his hand, alert, intent; strung with keen interest, with earnest partisanship, conscious at the moment that somehow, in the last few minutes, their positions had become reversed. Heretofore Watson's clever hand had deftly steered Falls's craft amid the shoals and breakers of his own familiar home waters; now, Falls perceived, the time had come when he must put forth his own capable hand to bring his friend's craft head to the wind. On the instant his decision was taken; he had reviewed the possible trend of affairs and braced himself for action before he spoke again.

"Tell me," he said simply; "my matters can stand over."

"I 'm going to tell you; that is why I have sent for you; but your matters can't stand over, Falls. We 'll have to take 'em on together; it 's too late to unwind them—even if we could. Things are tangled up—damnably! Listen: I 'm in the devil of a mess! I 'm learning, experimentally, the meaning of your term, 'squeezing'; only the process I 'm undergoing does not stop there."

"Money?" asked Falls gently.

"No."

"Ah—a woman!"

"Yes; two."

"The devil! Who 's turning the screw?"

"Hallett, d—— him! He and the rest of his gang."

"Ah!" said Falls again, this time with clearer comprehension. "Hallett," Falls began, and paused in scorn too deep for words. "It would be odd, Hugh, if you and I together could not block any game that Hallett could put up!"

For a second Watson's unquenchable humor shone out. "Together! We two together? Aye, that 's the very crux of the matter, Gregory! *That* is where he is putting the screw — to choke me off from your affairs. To muzzle me, in fact, to tie my hands in the courts. This thing is quite melodramatic when you 're on the inside, Falls. This is no vulgar business rizzle; it is a transaction in hearts,—mine and Betty Archer's."

"Ah!" said Falls once more.

Falls leaned forward in his chair. "I cannot work the combination, Watson; I have n't the word, you know," he said quietly.

"Nearly any word — of those which a man would be most reluctant to use about himself — would work it," Watson said bitterly. "This is a nice bit of moral muck I 'm about to drag you through, Falls! Right down into the primal mud it is. Well—" He threw his heavy form back in his chair with a savage lurch, and, locking his hands behind his head, stared straight before him.

"You 've seen since you have been here a girl — Rosebud? Yes; Miss Archer's maid. Well," — he loosened his tie with a savage jerk, as though it choked him, — "that girl — that colored girl — is my daughter."

Falls did not speak, but kept the steady kindness of his eyes upon Hugh's face as he resumed: "Sixteen, seven-

teen years ago—I was a lad of twenty then, living with Uncle John at Hillcrest in vacations when I was home from the university. It was there I met—Rosebud's mother. Uncle John had married for the second time—a beautiful Louisiana girl, Joan's mother, and the most exquisite creature! She did not live two years. Well, Felicia brought with her as a maid, from New Orleans, this woman—Lesby. Lesby was Rosebud's mother.

"I wonder," said Hugh, "if you, with your clean, cold New England standards, can form any conception of what it means to be born to a heritage of lust—with the means of its gratification always at your elbow. I had two hundred years of slaveholding ancestry behind me, two hundred years of the garnered instincts of men who had held such creatures as Lesby as goods and chattels. And I was a gallows young ass in those days! Well, to cut it short: a boy of twenty, a summer in Dixie—and Lesby! She was a warm, bright-colored creature, voluptuous and passionate, as all those women are—years older than I. You know the rest, Falls?"

"Aye, 'without benefit of clergy!' Go on; how did it end?"

"It has not ended yet," said Hugh slowly. "Felicia died; Uncle John needed me, and I came home from college. Lesby had gone—vanished, as a snake slips into the grass, leaving Rosebud to my care in a note mailed from an ocean steamer."

He paused with an unpleasant laugh. "Adairville has the vice of all small towns; it dearly loves to ferret out family skeletons. Everybody knows everybody else's, and can articulate 'em and name each bone. But, by God's

good grace I was able to hide mine! I had a man to look after her; she has never known neglect. All went well until this last development.” Hugh rose to find his pipe, lighted it, and cast himself down, one foot across the arm of the chair, smoking hard.

“After sixteen years of peace I had grown careless, or callous—or both. The girl was grown, able to fend for herself—too able, as it turned out. I meant to get her away—buy her off, you know. I wanted to marry—to marry Betty; and there was danger always. The only grain of comfort that I have had in the whole blasted mess has been that I am still a free man; that when Betty leaves me—” He paused a moment, steadied himself, went on: “If Betty leaves me, it will not be my wife who leaves me! You do not know, Falls—do you?—what it means to love a woman as though she were your wife, and then to lose her by what is worse, infinitely worse, than death! To go on living here, seeing her—seeing some other man court her, marry her—God! . . . I had no dream that the girl was nearer here than two hundred miles when I met her that night at Hillcrest; and later Betty told me calmly that she was living in Mr. Archer’s house as her maid.”

A smile gleamed in Falls’s dark eyes.

“One of life’s little ironies, Hugh. What did you do?”

“Proceeded to cut my own throat in the promptest and most methodical manner. Benson told me he could do nothing with the girl. I decided upon a desperate remedy; I sent for Rosebud. It was my only hope of influencing her; and she did consent to my plan to go away. She was gentle—tractable; everything was ready.

Then — she disappeared. Until two days ago I had not an idea where she could be; I know now."

"Hallett?"

"Aye; you have the combination now, Falls."

"Yes; I see."

Falls was engrossed in puzzled thought. That letter? What part did it play in this cruel scheme? Hugh had not mentioned it; he decided after a second's hard thought that he would not himself refer to it — not yet.

"Still," he said gently, "still, Hugh, if Hallett has no proof, your influence with Miss Archer must outweigh every one else's."

"There is proof," said Watson wearily. "I mean it exists — but in whose hands? If I had any means of knowing — if I could but be certain that Hallett had it —" His strong white hand shut slowly, with a cruel, rigid movement. "But there is always the doubt. Women and letters! It has been proved again and again."

He leaned over and laid his hand upon Falls's knee with an insistent pressure. "You see, Falls, where all this has led us? It is you, old man, you or — Betty!"

"Unless we can find a way out," said Falls quietly. "If we do not, we will not sacrifice Miss Archer between us. Women's hearts are not the sort of stuff to be mixed up in a rizzle of this kind."

Falls roused himself from a trance of thought and turned to Hugh, who saw with amazement that his steady eyes were alight with some purpose, his stern lips bent into a slight smile as he spoke. "They have a saying in the Isle of Man, 'Close is my shirt, but closer is my skin.' May I ask you a question, Hugh, rather closer

than your shirt, but not as close as Betty Archer? Yes? Do you care at all for this girl — in the sense of natural affection, I mean?"

"I loathe her," said Hugh briefly, "in the sense you mean! Every drop of blood in my body turns cold with disgust at the thought — the sight of her! But, understand me, Falls, this is a mere matter of instinct — a purely physical revulsion, to which my mind does not consent." He dropped his head in puzzled thought. "Strange inconsistency of the human mind — I tell you I loathe her, yet I would give every drop of my blood to save her from harm — from the fate in store for her at Hallett's hands!"

"Sure," said Falls, and laid his hand upon his friend's knee with a caress as tender as a woman's. "I 'm getting onto — into, which ever it is — this race prejudice of you Alabama people." Falls was seeing, as he spoke, a pair of gray eyes frozen with pain and disgust. "Suppose, Hugh, that this letter you spoke of — which Hallett may have — suppose it was not in his possession, after all, how far could he make use of the girl herself? How far would her unsupported assertion go?"

"About as far as that smoke which you are blowing into the air. Men call that sort of thing blackmail. It 's common here; it would be dismissed with a wink — a sneer; old Ben Archer himself would not believe it; Hallett would not dare show in it. I was pressing the girl hard to get her out of Hallett's hands, but I was not uneasy on my own account; and the letter only reached her hands about three hours before she was to have left here."

Falls rose, shook the ashes from his pipe, beat the

bowl upon his palm, stretched then his big form carelessly.

"I 'm going to walk about a bit, Hugh; I want to think this out alone; and I 'm used to doing my thinking in the open. Will you be up a little later? I 'm such a nocturnal beast myself." He leaned over Watson and deftly slipped his glasses off. "They are awfully out of plumb; let me tinker them a bit."

Falls's own beautiful revolver, which he had given Hugh weeks before, lay upon the mantelpiece at Falls's elbow; he took it up under Watson's near-sighted eyes and slipped it into his pocket, and after a moment more of clever handling of the glasses handed them to Hugh.

"They 're all right now; you should never be without them, Hugh. You have no idea how easily one can take advantage of you; you 're blind, man, without them!" Falls turned at the door: "If I 'm late, don't wait up."

He ran lightly down the steps to the street, and without a second's pause turned to his left and struck across the Court-house Square. After five minutes of rapid walking, he emerged opposite the building where Hallett's rooms were. A light shone from a side window, falling in a wide bar across the street.

"He 's up," said Falls to himself; "good!"

He knew the arrangement of Hallett's rooms well, having spent a day or two as his guest upon his arrival. He ran up to the hall upon which all the doors of the suite opened, and entered without knocking, through the door of the sitting-room, and had a clear view of Hallett in the lighted bedroom two doors beyond.

"Hallett?" he called. "It is I, Falls. I want to see you a minute."

Hallett, wrapped in a bath-robe, came through the intervening rooms, taking scant pains to disguise his surprise and displeasure at the unexpected summons.

Falls coolly turned on the light upon the desk in the center of the room, and, stepping behind Hallett as he entered, turned the key in the door and withdrew it from the lock. Hallett's fresh color paled a trifle, and he glared at Falls in cold fury. Falls laid the key and his own pistol upon the mantelpiece and leaned his back against it, facing Hallett as he spoke:

"Your pistols are in your bedroom, I know; there is mine."

"You are well up in the rôle of midnight assailant, Mr. Falls," said Hallett, with acrid scorn. "Practice, I suppose?"

"No," said Falls carelessly, "this is my first appearance in the rôle. Hallett," he went on without pause, "I want Watson's letter, which you took from my hand three months ago in the park down there, under pretense of returning it to —"

"I did return it."

"We 'll pass that; the point is this: as I was fool enough to trust you with it, I am in that far responsible for its safe-keeping and its return to its owner —"

"Who is its owner?"

"I 'll pass that, also. I 'm not a court of equity; and that issue is not before us. I don't care to whom it may belong! But — I 've come to have you return it to me now."

"When you have established your right to its custodianship," said Hallett with quiet insolence.

Falls crossed the space between them with a stride, and

dropped the iron grip of his heavy hands upon Hallett, twisting him as a man twists a sapling to uproot it. Hallett's close-knit strength and suppleness held its own for a few moments, but he was no match for Falls, who inch by inch bore him back, his hand upon Hallett's throat, Hallett's supple form strained across his knee, his fair face black with passion, his nostrils straining for breath.

"Have I established my right sufficiently, Hallett? Will you give me the letter without further demonstration? Yes? Get up, then."

Falls sprang up, releasing Hallett, who rose more slowly. Falls could see the fierce restraint he was putting upon himself in his struggle to regain the composure which he meant to maintain at any cost, and with it all that remained to him of dignity in the encounter.

"The paper is in the private drawer of the desk behind you," he said with tremulous dignity. "It has a secret spring."

"I know," said Falls, and bent to open it. In the second that he turned his back, Hallett made a silent spring to the pistol upon the shelf behind Falls. But even as he was about to grasp it, he started back. The loose skirt of his bath-robe had brushed the glowing bars of the grate and the flame sprang upward. Falls swung round in time to see Hallett's quick motion toward the pistol, and his scornful glance seared Hallett like a flaming brand.

"You hound!"

"Not at all," said Hallett coolly — he had himself well in hand — "not at all! In brute strength, Mr. Falls, you are vastly my superior; that little toy would have equalized us, that is all!"

"I don't think I have much the advantage of you, Hallett"—Falls was arranging the papers neatly in the drawer as he had found them, and rose with Hugh's letter in his hand—"in brute strength, or, let us say, brutal application of such strength as you may have acquired. This little thing," he held up the letter, "and the use you were making of it, warrants any little—er—roughness I may have used in regaining its possession. And I shall in time take from you that other helpless tool you may try to use!"

A spasm of silent rage crossed Hallett's face.

"I thought," he said with slow insult, "that you had your hands full with Miss—"

"Don't dare!" cried Falls, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, it was so hoarse with passion. "Don't dare, Hallett—unless you want to die!" They faced each other for a moment, both men breathing quickly; then with a look of unutterable contempt—a look that stung even Hallett's hardened sensibilities—Falls walked out of the room.

"Sleep, Watson?" asked Falls, ten minutes later, from the door of his own room.

"Naw," drowsily; "come in."

"Just a minute." Falls came in without coat or vest, the short pipe in his mouth, a light of quiet pleasure in his dark eyes. "I have a paper of yours." He turned on the light at the head of Hugh's bed, and handed him the letter. Watson took it, glanced it over carelessly, started, sat erect, staring at Falls silently, as his mind, in one smooth roll, took in the whole.

"You—you old Indian! How did—"

"Simply enough. You see, I knew Hallett had it; so I stepped round there and — got it."

"Got it! Of course, you mean you took it — *vi et armis?*"

"I — suppose so. I have forgotten my Latin. I choked him till he gave in," said Falls simply.

Watson laughed his big laugh of sheer delight.

"Oh, tell it, man! For Gawd's sake tell it!"

"There 's nothing to tell — and I 'm so deuced sleepy, Hugh."

"Watson?" he called a moment later.

"Well?"

"Don't let that black automaton of yours —"

"Naw. Sleep all day if you like."

He was snoring in five minutes, but Watson rose, and flinging his dressing-gown about him, sat out the dawn.

He smiled as he held the letter in the flames, watching it turn to a phantom sheet whereon the ghost of his letter lingered, dimly visible in pallid lines, through which ran a fiery serpent of dying sparks.

"Be good if you can — but if you can't, be careful!" he murmured. A sudden sound smote upon his ear, and he rose and went to the window. Outside, the pearly reaches of the dawn were creeping upward from behind the dim underworld, though the streets still were gulfs of darkness, from which were borne to Hugh's ear, in the dead stillness of the town, the muffled tread of horses' feet, a thin rattle of steel, then, full and clear, a hound's deep bay.

Hugh smote his hand upon the sill in sudden recollection.

"I had forgotten. They must have caught that poor

devil!" He leaned across the sill and spoke in cautious tone to a man whose steady tread sounded below him on the pavement.

"That you, Kelly, is it? Who's that they're bringing in?"

"Yes, it's Kelly; that's you, Mr. Watson?"

"Yes."

"It's the posse er comin' in; they've got Will-Henery and urnuther nigger—I disremembers his name—"

"Good night!"

Hugh slowly closed the window. His face was grave. "If that poor, hunted devil, with the hound's teeth in him, should have implicated Falls—"

He extinguished the outer light, and, taking a candle, passed onward to his own room. Obeying a sudden impulse, he turned to Falls's room, and, shielding the light, peered in at the sleeping man. Falls slept profoundly, his dark head thrown back upon the pillow, the stern lines of his face relaxed in calm repose.

"I'd knock the bottom out of, not only their rotten Tenth Circuit, but the State of Alabama before they should touch him!" murmured Watson grimly.

His lips softened with a smile, whimsical, humorous. "Close-mouthed old Indian! Has n't breathed where he's been all day; thinks I don't know a word. Old cast-iron statue of Abraham Lincoln!" he murmured, and left him to his slumbers.

XIII

THE CURSE OF DIXIE

THE weather vouchsafed to the valley of the Tennessee by the deities of the Weather Bureau was ideal Yule-tide weather.

So conventionally perfect was it in every detail as to suggest an emblazoned Christmas card; and eyes were dazzled by the clear-cut blues and silvers of the sky and frost, the shimmer of gilded sunlight and the jovial red of holly against masses of evergreens, dusted with a sparkling diamond-dust of frost.

From the heights beyond the town, in the intensely rarefied atmosphere, Adairville took on the semblance of those fairy cities etched by frost sprites upon the window-panes, while weary mortals sleep. A city of the mist, built of the stuff which dreams are made of, the little town lay like a frozen pearl upon the heaving bosoms of the low green hills, while high above it the spire of the Brotherhood of Christ, like an extended arm, held aloft its silver cross, flashing like a heliotrope, from hill to hill, its holy message of peace on earth.

Joan, driving rapidly along the road which wound among the hills toward Adairville, looked down upon the town at her feet, wrapped in a white dream of peace, and felt her heart swell with the first throes of the same bitter resentment which had shaken Falls's deep voice

the day before, when he had pointed out to her, with scathing irony, the significance of that message of peace held high above the menace of the low sword.

Her horse's feet rang cheerily upon the hard road with a musical rhythm good to hear; the morning sun gilded a scene of enchanting beauty all down the jeweled length of the valley; the thin, buoyant air whipped the blood to keen elation along the veins, making Joan's beautiful thoroughbred mare prance and curvet; but the debonair figure, wrapped in rich furs, with a dainty toque of peacocks' breasts upon her crisp waves of bright hair, sat motionless upon the driver's seat in the pretty cart, plunged in deep and troubled thought. She was recalling paragraph after paragraph of the report of the capture of the two negroes which had appeared in that morning's edition of the *Enterprise*. The report had contained nothing pertinent to the bare fact of the capture of the two men, Will-Henry and Sledge, charged with having committed the "deed of vengeance," as Montgomery named the murder of Buckley Shirley; but it had literally reeked with veiled hints of the fate in store for "those in high places" who, it was covertly insinuated, had instigated the negroes to do the killing, and whom their confessions had implicated directly in the crime.

Other arrests would follow shortly; the town was quiet now—with insidious emphasis—but Holmes County felt deeply the outrage it had suffered in the foul and unprovoked assassination of a member of a family peculiarly endeared to its people—and so on for columns.

Judge Adair had read the report during the intervals of breakfast, his face growing sterner with each flaming period. He said nothing as he folded the paper with a

too gentle precision, and laid it aside with the air of one who puts by a dangerous explosive.

Joan noted the action from where she sat across the table, her white chin in her palm, studying her father's face with anxious eyes, a chill premonition weighing on her heart.

"Will there be trouble, father?" she asked, as she met his eyes at last.

"Yes," said the old man deliberately, "there will be trouble—I think. There will be, certainly, if Alec Montgomery and his ring of 'home capitalists' can compass it. Dairville is primed for it—chock-full of countrymen and moonshine whiskey. And the *Enterprise* spurring them on. Yes, there will be trouble; whether it will involve Falls—" his eyes fell upon Joan's face, and he turned with a startled gesture toward her and held out his arms.

"Why, daughter! Joan, child, I thought you understood the town by this. There will be no danger to you, my pet."

The old man held her close, chafing her white cheek with his own. He chuckled softly.

"Are you showing the white feather before Alec Montgomery at last, Joan? Has this last broadside of bombast brought down your colors?" Joan rallied in the warm shelter of her father's arms, and smiled faintly.

"Such a pity," she murmured, "Christmas, and all that—and to have this hateful thing happen!"

"Is n't this the night of your ball?" Judge Adair asked.

"Yes, father, everything is ready." Her eyes were

absent, still, and the hand with which she adjusted her father's tie was not as firm as its light touch was wont to be.

"Father, ought not Mr. Falls to go away from Adairville until —?"

"It would be wise, perhaps; but Falls will not go, of course."

"Not if Hugh urged him? Or if — if others —"

"Challie would not so advise him; I should not, in his place."

"Not if he were in danger, father dear?"

Judge Adair's face grew stern again; he flipped the flimsy sheets of the *Enterprise* with a scornful finger.

"A man could not yield to pressure like that, Joan. And apart from that, it would mean financial ruin to Falls. If I am not strangely mistaken in the man, Falls will see this through. With Watson and a conservative course, this trouble here may be averted."

"But, father, if Mr. Falls should not be guided by Hugh — if he went his own way as he did about the street-cars and Will-Henry!"

"Oppose the mob in the hanging of these negroes, you mean?"

"Yes," she breathed.

"He will not be so mad. But if he did — if he *were* so mad — Falls would hang. No power on earth could save him from the mob!"

Silently Joan fell forward in her father's arms, smothering her moan of anguish upon his breast.

The lawn in front of Mr. Archer's house was still tucked away under the sparkling coverlid of the frost,

when Joan drew rein at the gate to await Betty, who was to join her in the morning's shopping in town.

She came out at last, furred and feathered and velvet-coated to a degree that caused Joan's eyes to linger upon her in suspicious inventory, as she tucked the rug about her.

"Why, Betty Archer!" still looking her over with open and shocked inspection, "are not these your trousseau clothes? It is aw-fully unlucky to wear them before the wedding!"

"Pooh!" said Betty, serenely above superstition. "What in the wide world could come between Hugh and me now? It is too late for any of the ordinary things—jealousy and that. And I don't believe," she said reflectively, though a glint of steel showed in the depths of her flower-soft eyes, "that I could be jealous of Hugh. If he told me with his own lips that he loved another woman, I simply should not believe him!"

"Of course not," smiled Joan, slightly superior, "if he told you himself. But, my lady Betty, if some one else told you?"

"It would not matter," firmly, "who told me. If every man, woman, and child in 'Dairville, with Mrs. Eldridge-Jones at the head of the line—that's just where she'd be—and Emmy Speight's brand-new baby at the foot, all told me over and over that Hugh loved another woman, I should not believe it! For he has told me over and over that he loves only me!"

Joan freed one hand from the reins and softly patted Betty's shoulder. "That is p-e-rfectly lovely in you, Betty! But suppose, just suppose, you know, Betty, that they gave you some sort of proof, you know?"

"No; women in books and those awful ones who bring breach of promise cases in the courts may need proof of a man's love; but in real life — like with you and me, Joan — loving is its own proof."

"This is ch-a-rming in you, Betty! Like a book, only much better done. But," she went on a little shyly, "I should want to love with my whole being, heart and mind and soul!" She looked straight ahead with unseeing eyes, across which a shadow of pain had fallen. "To love with the heart, and not the mind — the soul; to shrink from the touch which thrills you; to have your ear ache for the sound of a voice, and your soul recoil with horror from the sentiments it utters! What hideous turmoil — what mortal conflict! . . . Betty, Betty, would n't it be horrible?"

"Yes, indeed," said Betty, with startled comprehension in voice and eyes; "for — for every one to know — like poor Mrs. Evert."

They drove in silence for a few minutes, the wind tugging at their wraps and tingling in their cheeks.

"Have you heard about Rosebud?" asked Betty, breaking the silence with a careless question.

Joan was busy for the moment with the reins, and answered indifferently: "No; is she coming back, after all, to be your maid?"

"I should think not," said Betty, a cold reserve in her voice suggestive of old Ben Archer's ruthless sense of duty. "She has not been anywhere to come back from," she continued. "Rosebud has never been out of 'Dairville."

There was a pause, and a glance of keen significance from Betty, and Joan blushed hotly. "Who has been

gossiping to you, Betty? I would not allow such things to be told me," said Joan with cold reproof.

"It's all over town," said Betty vaguely but unrebuffed, adding irrelevantly, "That is what comes of negro equality."

She looked carefully away from Joan as she spoke, tucking in the rug upon her side with elaborate care, and she did not see the flood of angry scarlet which poured across Joan's cheek, nor the proud dilation of her nostril. When she looked again, Joan's cheek had its own soft pallor, but her tone of apologetic courtesy had a cutting edge which told Betty's wise ear that her shaft had found its mark.

"Father is the dearest — the best, you know, Betty; but he is particular about this sort of thing. He insists that I do not listen to gossip of — of this sort. If you will excuse me, shall we drop this?"

"If you like, Jo," with tactful good temper. "I wanted you to know — I mean, I wanted to tell you before some one else did —"

"I do not think," with proud scorn, "that I am a person to invite this sort of confidence. Why should you have feared for me?"

Silence answered her, a silence more eloquent than words. The smart cart rolled gaily onward to the music of Nanny's hoofs upon the highway, a galaxy of mimic suns flashing back from her harness, but Joan's blind eyes saw them not.

A scorching shame seemed slowly to consume her; she writhed under a maddening sense of a something contaminating — humiliating.

The curse of Dixie! As far back as Joan could re-

member, she had heard with bated breath of this curse — of those shapeless things with cowled heads turned aside, which hung upon the dark side of life in Dixie; nameless words of dread which haunted the hidden corridors of men's speech — hinted at, but never named.

They came boldly forth, now, to confront Joan's shrinking soul; gibed at her, shamelessly claimed acquaintance with her, as part and parcel of the dark secrets of her race. With shame and anguish she heard within herself a voice speaking their tongue. This horror was real then; Alec Montgomery's blatant tirades had covered — this? She had thought them words — words, empty of aught but sound. And now she saw those empty words take form. Empty words no longer, but living passions; she felt their hot hands seize her; heard their voices gibber at her ear. "We are the Curse of Dixie!" they shouted. "You, a Southern woman, and not know our faces! All the proud women of your line have known us. We are the Nameless Shame, the Hidden Pain! Their proud eyes never looked our way, their pure lips never named us; but — they knew us, even as you!"

Joan's breath sobbed in her throat; her eyes were blind with pain. Nanny was disdainfully threading the narrow streets leading to the business part of town, but Joan still sat motionless, her hands gripping the reins, fighting down a vision of Falls's face as he had bent over her the day before at the mountain house, his deep gaze frankly tender.

She shivered. What was it she had just said to Betty? To love with the heart, the mind not consenting — conflict she had named it then. It was agony!

"Joan!" shrieked Betty, as they spun round a corner upon a motionless cordon of men drawn across the street; but Joan had seen—or Nanny saw, and swerved aside.

"Why are they standing in the street, then? How could I know they were not going to move? If this had been Ritchie—"

"They are soldiers, goose; see the guns! Why, surely you know, Jo? It's all over town!" Her favorite formula fell glibly from Betty's lips, as she waved her little gloved hand toward the line of soldiers standing on guard across the street leading to the jail.

"That is the Alabama National Guard, if you please. . . . Don't tell me, Joan Adair, that you have not read Alec's 'piece'? Well, those are 'the noble lives standing between us and Anarchy'!" She laughed lightly. "They'd run if you said turkey—if you even whispered it! Pl-e-a-se look at the airs those absurd men are putting on—with those silly guns! Every one in the place knows there's nothing in them. . . . What? Oh, they are guarding the jail to keep the mob from hanging Will-Henry and that other nigger—I forget his name. Why, Jo, how silly! Turning pale about ur nigger getting hung! What earthly difference? There are plenty of niggers. And they ought to be hung—or burned—or something," she went on placidly, the trill of laughter still upon her lips, "and the white men, too, who put them up to killing poor Buck!"

The rug was getting refractory again; Betty stooped to adjust it.

"They say Mr. Falls has left town. No one has seen him since he got in from the East and heard about the posse being out after Will-Henry."

"How do they know that no one has seen him?" asked Joan quietly.

"They have a watcher," said Betty easily.

"Betty," gasped Joan, "how do you know these dreadful things?"

"Lynn told me. It's Andy Caruthers."

The smart little cart, with the two prettiest girls in the place as occupants, drew every eye as it made its slow way along the crowded streets. It was soon piled with packages as they went from store to store.

"There is Hugh!" cried Betty. "Do stop, Jo; I want him to see my coat."

Nothing loath, Joan pulled Nanny up, and Watson leaned upon the cart to chat, openly adoring both Betty and the coat with entire impartiality. He was full of his old gay humor; indeed, Joan thought, interrogating his face with wistful eyes, that she had never seen him happier. Her troubled heart drew comfort from the fact, and she entered into the talk going on about the cart, where a circle of young men had gathered, with something of her old raillery.

It was a gay crowd, the men chaffing one another, and the girls, with nonsense and much laughter—the sweet, ready laughter of youth which waits not on wit nor epigram, but is its own excuse for being.

The talk was all of the ball that night at Hillcrest and the next night at the Dixie Club.

"There's a report about town that you are to wear the Gown, Joan! Is it true? I want to know—to get braced up to it; I've a weak heart. You know about my weak heart, Joan," said Jemmy Page insinuatingly.

"Indeed I do not!" laughed Joan, "and don't try

to put the responsibility of your damaged organ off on me, Jemmy. Go to that Latham girl from Atlanta for sympathy — or damages. No; I 'm going to run in an old gown on you boys to-night. But to-morrow night — when I am with my lord the Chief Justice of the great Commonwealth of Alabama!"

"Go to! Who cares for titles?" droughtily.

"Right you are, Jemmy!" cried Hugh, putting his long arm round the lad.

They were half-romping together, and the boy drew Watson farther from the crowd about the cart, which Hallett and Tom Evert had just joined.

"Is it true Falls has jumped the town, Hugh?"

"You young ass — Falls!" Watson turned aside, with his arm still about the boy. "What d' you mean, Page?"

"Why, they say Falls has bolted — 'fread to face the mob! He has n't been seen since he got back — did n't sleep in his room at the hotel last night — has not showed up this morning. They 've a watcher in the lobby." He cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder toward the group. "Fur Gawd's sake, Hugh — "

"Naw; no one will ever know that you have given me this tip, Page. But I 'll remember it, and Falls will. Who 's the spy?"

"Andy Caruthers."

Hugh thought rapidly; he set his strong teeth in an exasperation too deep for words. If he could but keep Falls where he was for forty-eight hours, they might think what they please. But that could not be done, he well knew, and, failing that, a bold game was best. How to play it?

For a moment longer Watson stood in deep thought

before the spark struck in his brain which fired his line of action. In that brief space of introspection he saw his way as a man sees a blazed trail leading away through the devious aisles of the dim forest; glancing from point to point, his mind caught each salient circumstance which might serve to guide him along the blind path of his purpose.

"With another d—— fork in it!" he muttered. On the one hand Falls's personal safety, on the other Falls's business integrity.

He must slay with one hand this hydra-headed, multi-tongued rumor before it reached Falls's ears—that might be done—while he held down with the other hand the wild beast of public opinion, whose gathering roar was even now in his ear, its hot breath on his cheek.

But this was familiar ground. Watson had fought this dragon before. He knew it well; knew that it was all stupid brain and jaundiced eye and blatant roar. Knew that he had vanquished it before, that he might again; and he braced his nerve to the fight.

"Only one thing on this earth is more fickle, or more cruel, than a woman," he mused, "and that thing is public opinion. Well, I 've wheedled both."

But he did not deceive himself as to the difficulties of the task he had set before him. He knew what it meant to cast the weight of one man's influence into the scale against the town, and this time against the town's interest, as the town saw it.

It would be a bitter duel, in which his personal influence over the minds and wills of other men would be opposed to that of the ring of men backed by Montgomery's paper, who, as Watson realized with bitter indig-

nation, were instigating popular feeling against Falls with the single aim of forcing him out of Adairville, freezing him out of business.

That they were deliberately using the chance which mocking circumstance had thrown in their way, and by the aid of their mouthpiece, Montgomery, were whipping the passions of the crowd of ignorant and vicious men whom accident and holiday time had drawn together in the town, to further their own ends, Hugh did not for a moment doubt; although the brutal unscrupulousness of the attempt struck him aghast, well as he knew the mettle of the town and the men behind it in this attempt.

In indignant summary Watson's mind seized upon the one element in the whole incredible situation which made it possible of conception — credible of human belief. It was the lack of individual responsibility.

Watson well knew that this plot, in its fiendish inception, had been the work of no one mind; that no single brain had formulated it; no lip had dared to give it utterance; but that, like some hideous evolution emerging from the womb of time, it had developed without extraneous aid; the impulse had been born as are born convulsions of nature. Thus would it pursue its devastating course, thus bury itself again in the bosom of the past, and no one man be to blame.

"Aye, I know them!" Watson finished his grim soliloquy. "I can win out against them, too, if I can manage Falls." His smile was grimly whimsical. "The dear fool! He 'll be after collecting evidence, making affidavits — so much waste paper! Wanting me to set the hounds of justice upon the leaders of the mob; and that

in a county where mobs and juries are drawn from the same box!"

Watson ran his eye over the crowded street with a glance practised in the art of sifting men and classifying them with instant perception of their relation to the purpose which he might have in mind. The hour was well on toward noon, and the streets were bright with holiday shoppers; business men, with the urbanity of the after-lunch mood, lingered in the genial warmth of the mid-day sun, often with heads bent close in low-voiced, unsmiling talk. Hugh's anxious mind had not far to seek for the subject which thus engrossed them.

A dozen yards away Alec Montgomery stood upon the flags in front of the Adair hotel, surrounded by an ever growing group of men whose lean, sinewy forms, rough clad in nondescript jeans, stiffened by time and weather until the marks of the sculptor's chisel seemed visible upon the rigid folds, proclaimed them to be mountain men. Hugh's covertly anxious eye failed to detect a show of interest in the motionless circle, expression and attitude alike evincing bored and listless inattention; neither assent nor denial touched the faces turned upon Montgomery with the impassivity of their native limestone. But Watson knew that a man might as well try to turn or change them from their course as arrest a boulder in its downward plunge amid a landslide.

Montgomery's fair face, its womanish beauty marred and coarsened by dissipation, was deeply flushed, and his still, ice-blue eye shot a warmer beam than it was wont to do; a word occasionally tripped and stumbled upon his lips, as he talked earnestly and volubly to an ever-increasing audience. The detail from the jail just

off duty, trailing their guns in braggart hands, mingled with the group of mountaineers, answering their brief questions with condescending explanations of the mechanism of the guns, surrendering them to the strangers with suppressed laughter and half-spoken words of mutual understanding.

Andy Caruthers sauntered out of the open doorway of the hotel, and was instantly surrounded by an eager circle.

"Well?" said a man in the circle.

"Naw!" said Andy.

Casual passers-by turned an attentive ear in passing; men, busy with their Christmas shopping, paused, listened, edged away, and passed on, a dubious gravity upon their faces. Twenty feet away the pretty cart still stood, surrounded by the men who lingered in gay talk with the two girls, while Nanny tugged at her reins and pawed the unoffending pavements.

"A-w, Jackson!" called Watson, over the heads of the passing throng, his mellow voice carrying easily to the ears of a negro seated at his ease upon a pile of baggage in front of the hotel. The Honorable Peter Lacey Jackson, erstwhile member of the Legislature for the State of Alabama, now enjoying the more congenial, no less honorable, and scarcely less lucrative position of Watson's servant, disentangled himself from the ruck of porters and hotel servants which hung upon the outskirts of Montgomery's crowd and came nimbly at Hugh's call.

It was at once apparent that the pleasantest relations existed between the Honorable Peter and the man he served. He stood before Watson, his fine, urbane face the color exactly of burnt paper, ready, at his bidding, to undertake anything, from another term in the Legis-

lature to brushing his coat, each with equal zeal and intelligence. He did not forget that he was the Honorable Peter Lacey Jackson, nor did Hugh forget it or ignore it; they met in the relation of servant and not master — never again that — but employer, sanely and kindly, with mutual respect.

"Yes," Hugh had said when the humor of having a member of his State's lawmaking body as his servant was first suggested to him, "yes; Pete is my private servant, and I'm Pete's private attorney. He looks after my rooms and my clothes and keeps me comfortable; and I look after his 'vorces' and keep him out of the penitentiary. No problem at all. Simple case of reciprocity."

"Lacey," he said now, tossing him a bunch of keys over the heads of a dozen men — who turned to laugh and listen, as Hugh had calculated they would do — "take these keys and go round to my place and wake Mr. Falls up; tell him I sent you."

"What is Mr. Falls doing at your place, Hugh?" asked Betty curiously.

"He sleeps there frequently. I'd forgotten him — promised to wake him at noon. Going, girls? A-w, Joan!"

He drew Joan down and whispered a brief message:

"Falls is in no great danger; you shall know anything that happens, and at once; don't worry."

Milly Ann met the two girls in the hall of Hillcrest with a huge florist's package in her hand and a note for Joan from Falls. Merely a line pleading a business engagement, and his card in the package.

"P-e-rfectly *ex-quisite!*!" cried Joan, as both girls hung enraptured above the great sheaf of deep red, velvety

roses, whose stems set with purple thorns touched the ground.

"But, Joan, red—a blonde, and red! You cannot wear them; think of your gown!"

"I have other gowns," said Joan dreamily, "but these were not meant to wear."

She did not add what they were meant for, and Betty thought it better to refrain from inquiry.

XIV

"IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER"

WHEN the last glimpse of the cart and Betty's blue eyes was lost to view, Watson sauntered across to his rooms, where he found Falls demolishing a beefsteak in the sitting-room, while he endeavored with indifferent success to keep erect the meager sheets of the *Enterprise*, wherein he read eagerly the account of the capture of the two negroes.

"So they 've got that poor devil, Will-Henry," he said, as Hugh entered.

"Yes; I saw them bring him in last night. Who looked after you — the Honorable Peter?"

"D' you think I 'm a sucking baby that I can't look after myself?" inquired Falls absently, still immersed in the report of the capture. "What the devil," he broke out, astounded and indignant, "is this Montgomery after? Listen to this, Hugh — why, this thing is an open justification of lynching the men! An invitation to the mob to assemble! Does he dare —"

"Naw. Montgomery never dares. He waits until he sees which way the cat will jump, and then he sick his paper on. That did n't take any daring; the town 's on that side."

Watson flung himself into his lounging-chair, regarding Falls across the table with laughing eyes.

"I went down to the jail this morning to see Will-Henry." Hugh laughed lazily. "He called me 'Marst Hugh,' poor devil! His sort ordinarily would die before they would call a white man 'master.'"

"Right," said Falls; "why should he?"

"We were boys together," Watson went on meditatively. "I 've played marbles with him many a day on that common back of Hillcrest. In those days he called me 'Challie Watson,' and I called him 'Billy.'" Watson laughed again. "That 'Marst Hugh' fetched me! I could n't let 'em hang him without putting up some sort of a fight!"

Falls had flung the paper aside and was eating his breakfast meditatively. He looked across the rim of his coffee-cup at Watson with frank pity and concern.

"Watson, if you will take this case for Will-Henry, and I suppose we might as well dump in the other brute, I 'll settle your bill. Get any one you like to help you. Will you?"

Hugh looked at his friend with a comical pathos. "Falls, I hate this sort of thing. If it was just an ordinary crime — a plain killing — any other sort of trouble the negro was in, I 'd take it gladly, without any fee, of course. For auld lang syne, you know — and to pay off the score of the marbles I used to win from him. But as things are — this muck of passion and prejudice — and dirty publicity! There 's going to be trouble here; those negroes are going to be lynched. It 'll be in all the Northern papers, you know. I do not want to get mixed up in it — as having taken some stand or other about the solution of this infernal negro problem — with a capital N. There is n't any, you know. This mess here

now: it is not the murder of Shirley, *per se*, which is exciting the town — nobody cares a hang about Buck Shirley; it is race prejudice, pure and simple, and a determination to maintain what they call the supremacy of the Caucasian race. It grew out of the street-car incident."

He walked the length of the room and back, a worried frown upon his brow. "Why I hate it," he burst out anew, "is that here in Alabama, and all over the South, they make politics of this sort of thing — and the dirtiest sort! The nigger has been the stalking-horse of Democracy in the South for forty years; and all sorts of personal aims are advanced behind the bogey of negro equality."

He looked keenly at Falls as he finished, but Falls's face was alert with an interest as purely impersonal as though the discussion had involved the Chinese immigration act.

"Now, if I mix up in this," Hugh continued, "a perfect howl will go up all over the State that I 've turned Republican."

Falls turned his rare smile, with a flash of strong, white teeth, upon Watson's worried face. "You 're the best Republican I know, Hugh. But don't let this worry you. Suggest some one else. I 'll go at once—"

"Finish your breakfast." Watson walked to the window, his hands in his pockets, staring silently out into the street, thinking hard. "I 'll tell you what I 'll do, Greg. I saw both those men this morning; they had made no confession, and they will make none. I barely got in ahead of Montgomery. But the facts are these: Sledge did the killing — a private quarrel between him and Buck

Shirley, I take it. Will-Henry had been hiding out there in the sticks, and saw the thing done—slipped down there, after Sledge had gone, to see what he could steal. The poor fool ought to have known that Buck Shirley never had a cent in his life. Well, that 's how the dogs got on his trail—he handled Shirley, you know—the stupid fool! There 's nothing in the case; the most ignorant jury ever paneled in Holmes County—and we can get 'em right—could see the merits of it in a ten minutes' talk; yet God A'mighty himself could n't get them off! Sledge ought to hang; he 's as guilty as h—l! Well, yes; a trial—I can get them both a trial—in Cruikshanks's court," Watson laughed. "It 'll be a mere form, of course. It will give them twenty-four hours longer on earth, that 's all."

"But if you can prove Will-Henry's innocence—"

"Falls, dear fellow, the ghost of Daniel Webster could n't prove his innocence to a nigger-hating Holmes County jury! Lanier Shirley, this lad's father, was colonel of one of the foremost regiments of Alabama—right here, out of Holmes County. He brought home enough Yankee lead in his old carcass to start a foundry. Lanier Shirley is a Confederate veteran from 'way back!"

With cigar suspended, Falls was regarding Watson with open amazement. "What has all that got to do with a man's right to a fair trial by jury, thirty years after this maniacal struggle is over—and forgotten by sane men?" he demanded in deep-voiced indignation.

Hugh laughed again. "You innocent Yankee! These niggers are going to be lynched to-night, unless this farce of a trial is set on foot at once. I 'll see to it this afternoon. I 'll get a severance. I 'm not going to defend

Sledge. Oh, the court will appoint some attorney as Sledge's counsel; and I 'll hunt up some technicality, anything will do, and hang on for time."

Falls rose to go.

"Here!" cried Hugh, laying violent hands upon him and forcing him down into his chair. "Did you think I 'm going to do this 'all for the love o' you'? There is a string on it; it 's going to be done on the condition following, to wit" (he leaned over Falls, his hands upon his shoulders, an unaccustomed gravity in voice and eyes): "You are to promise me upon honor, Falls, that you will not say a word about this hanging, nor take any hand in it, unless you are yourself molested. In that case, promise me, Falls, that if that should happen, you will leave all to me. You will follow my advice, eh, Gregory?"

Watson's golden voice had sunk to its most wooing note. He hung over the big fellow with a suppressed passion of tenderness and anxiety.

"Is it fair to tie me up like this?" asked Falls restively.

"Yes; it is fair." Hugh paused a moment, hesitated. Falls's reserve was a barrier difficult to surmount. "I know a word to conjure with," he said at last. "Do not force me to use it, Falls. If you knew that, by placing yourself in danger — by taking any part, no matter how slight in this trouble here — you were causing pain, racking a woman's soul with anxiety —" He paused, and, turning from Falls, adjusted a picture-frame upon the mantelpiece, as he passed it, with a nervous hand, and left the room. He had turned Joan's sweet face to Falls — and left the two together.

He heard the street door close a moment later, and

when he returned to the sitting-room he found a slip of paper inscribed with the two words, "I promise," in Falls's writing, in the empty frame which had held Joan's picture.

"Light everything in the room that will light, Milly Ann! I 'm going to dress."

It was the night of the Dixie Club ball, and Joan, standing in the middle of her room, issued her orders with the brief incisiveness of a general upon the eve of battle.

"Put my gown on the bed,—slippers, stockings,—all those petticoats, the one with chiffon flounces on top. Now get out of my way, while I do my hair—and don't be a goose!" This last in laughing admonition, as she caught sight of Milly Ann's black face in the mirror literally molten with admiration.

The hair-dressing went on in silence for a few minutes; the shining twists of Joan's bright hair were drawn deftly, high upon her graceful head—the baby love-locks upon her square white brow being left to their own sweet will—a cluster of pearls securing a single, half-opened red rose, set high and almost hidden among the crisp waves.

"Milly Ann!"

"Ya'as 'm."

"Have you heard from Rosebud lately?"

"Naw 'm; I ain't never heard fum Rosebud. Rose ain't never writ to nobody 'n 'Dairville sence she went erway."

"Is n't that funny?"

"Naw 'm; Rose did n't never go wid her own color none; Rose 'lows she 's w'ite folks!" Milly Ann's soft

gurgle of laughter was discreetly suppressed as Joan made no reply. "But de niggers, dey ain't spiling none 'bouten hit. De colored folks is dun turn de back er deir ha-an' to Rose."

"Why, Milly Ann, I thought Rosebud was a nice girl — "

"Rosebud ain't got no ca'acter, Miss Jone; dat 's hit, no ca'acter!"

"O Milly Ann, it 's wicked to speak so — "

Milly Ann's snort of indignant protest was not so suppressed as to be totally without effect.

"W'en folkses gits deyse'ves read outen de *churches*, 'tain't no 'casion fur nobody to holt dey ha-an' no longer! W'en de churches dun sed dey say, den common folkses kin say dey say. Ennyhow dey doose hit," with philosophical calm.

Joan had been familiar all her life with this form of condign punishment meted out by the churches to some erring member; it was equivalent, she knew, to social ostracism among white people.

"How long has this talk about Rosebud been going on, Milly Ann?"

"She wuz read outen de churches 'bouten the time Mist'r Falls's 'chnery bruk down — when he went to de Norf to git hit mended up."

The eyes of the two girls met in the mirror; Joan's cool and wide, a frozen pain in their depths; Milly Ann's kind, inscrutable, a warm loyalty to Joan overlying the hereditary infidelities of her race.

"I would not be too quick to think evil, Milly Ann," said Joan gently; "it is very wicked to start this sort of talk about poor Rosebud. Get my skirt now."

The birthday gown was a thing of beauty. Fashioned of satin as thick and soft as Venetian leather, and the color of the bands of green ether which lie along the horizon after sunset on cold, clear winter days, it was softened by a vapor of chiffon held close to the shining surface of the satin by the weight of its own embroideries, through which the pale sheen of the satin struck with a broken gleam like moonlight. Joan's figure, as she moved, seemed enveloped in a delicate green haze. Her bust rose from the low, clinging corsage like the petals of a newly opened lily from out its calyx, its snowy swell unbroken save for a triple row of pearls. A wisp of the green vapor did duty for a sleeve, drooping low upon her arm to meet the loose folds of her glove.

Joan leaned closer to the mirror after the maid had left her, studying with wistful dissatisfaction the effect of the red rose in her hair. It dominated the color scheme of her toilette like a deep, rich organ note amid the harmonies of silver flutes.

Turning aside, Joan took up a cluster of long, creamy buds, and tried the effect of their sulphur-green hearts against the color of her gown, catching her breath with sheer artistic delight in the combination. Caldwell's flowers! She looked at them a moment longer, let them trail against her skirt, gloating upon their beauty, then laid them aside and took instead a dozen long-stemmed beauties whose glowing hearts matched the one in her hair.

"Is yu' gine to tek these raid roses, ur de ones th' Guv'ner er Alabama sarnt yu', Miss Jone?"

"He 's not a governor, Milly Ann; he 's nothing in

the w-i-de world but a chief justice! . . . The red ones, of course! Take the wraps on down."

Watson had dined at Hillcrest, and waited in the library, with Judge Adair and Caldwell, for Joan. All three men wore evening dress. Watson and Judge Adair were to follow Joan and her escort in a short while, and all were to meet at the ball.

Caldwell came to meet Joan as she entered. His glance went instantly to the flowers she carried. He raised the heavy head of one of them, looking with raised brows of inquiry from it to Joan, seeking explanation of her neglect of his own offering. He had the deliberately tender, half-masterful manner of the man who is sure of his ground with women; exquisitely deferential, his polished softness sheathed a cool consciousness of power, a relentless purpose to bend them to his will, which roused a latent antagonism in Joan, arraying the unyielding elements of her nature, which so few suspected her of possessing under her pliant charm, against Caldwell.

She withdrew the rose from his touch with a supple movement of her form, and flashed a bright, daring smile at him, challenging and coolly unattached.

A faint smile flitted across Caldwell's charming, sensitive face; he gave Hugh a guarded glance of keen delight. There was to be the added joy of conquest, then? There was another Richmond in the field!

XV

THE STRANGER WITHIN THEIR GATES

THE Dixie Club had for its residence a massive colonial building standing within its own grounds, which had been restored, together with the building, as nearly as possible to their old-time formal grandeur. The house had been one of the most imposing of the antebellum residences until, fallen from its high estate, it had passed into the lavish keeping of its present owners.

The clubmen had been wise enough to adapt themselves to their house rather than attempt to bend its unyielding austerity to their more modern ideas; and its restoration had been along the lines of early colonial taste.

The stately drawing-rooms on either side of the hall were decorated in the pure, pale colors, the classic lines, the marble and polished floors, of its old estate, everywhere to-night wreathed and garnished with masses of holly and mistletoe. Huge crystal chandeliers shed the radiance of wax candles upon the scene, while in the hall the Yule log burned in a great fireplace which yawned like a glowing cavern midway the length of the hall. Under the arch of the staircase, and full in the hearth's red glow, a huge holly-crowned table bore sturdily the weight of massive silver tankards filled with steaming apple-toddy and egg-nog, served by old-time "aunties" in snowy white,

with bright-colored turbans on their heads, who tendered to each guest a cup of Christmas cheer, upon which floated a bit of mistletoe.

For this was to be an old-time Dixie function; a regular "befo' de wah" ball, a compliment tendered to the old régime by the New South, and Adairville's four hundred had met to do it honor; the past and the present were met to-night to quaff a cup to the future.

The great doors of entrance were flung wide in hospitable greeting, and the reception committee stood within, welcoming the guests. By eleven o'clock the rooms were fairly full, and the pendants of the chandeliers kept a tinkling accompaniment to the cheerful hum of talk which almost overpowered the insistent strains of the band in the distance, playing over and over the piercing strains of Dixie.

Watson, standing in the group of gentlemen in the hall, and receiving the guests, felt a cautious touch upon his arm, and found Jemmy Page at his elbow.

"Come outside a minute, Hugh."

"I cannot leave my place, Jemmy."

"Well, listen — and fur Gawd's sake don't let on I told you! If you do, I 'll deny the whole blamed thing!"

"Of course," said Hugh. "Get on with it."

"Well, stop your laughing. It 's about Falls."

"Ah!" said Watson, keenly intent.

"Um-hum! I thought you 'd listen!" triumphantly. "Here, it 's this er way: I like Falls — I wish I had his muscle! — but they 're going to kick him out to-night — out of the club. It 's all fixed — cut and dried. Hal-lett and Tawm Evert — Payne 's in it, too; 'fact, nearly all of the clubmen are — and the others won't do any-

thing to stop it! I thought I 'd let you know. Don't ask me any more!"

"Just this, Jemmy — publicly?"

"Course, publicly! Where 'd be the use otherwise?"

"How 'd you get on?" Watson put his arm about the lad and drew him closer. "Don't you be scared —"

"Scared!" cried the boy roughly. "Who 's scared? It 's this er way: I 'm secretary of the club, you know — I heard it talked — I 'd er let Falls take care of himself, but when they drew Joan in —"

"Joan! What er you giving me, Page? There is n't a man in 'Dairville that would dare —"

"It 's to be when she is with Falls!" He glanced back over his shoulder uneasily. "Lemme go, Hugh; and you know enough — all I know."

The waltz within was just over as Hugh reached the hall, his face dark with anger. He endeavored to snatch a moment to think, to work out, with the meager facts at his command, some counter plan to save his friend. He sought insistently within himself for some excuse which might serve to detain Falls — prevent his coming to the ball. Yet he had counted on having Falls here — under his eye — where no trouble could result, while the lynching of the negroes took place, as Hugh felt sure it would do before midnight. As he stood swiftly balancing the choice of evils, answering with mechanical gaiety the greetings of the guests, he saw Falls approaching from the direction of the cloak-room.

As he flashed his eye over the line of men receiving with him, he perceived a certain stiffening of manner as they, too, recognized Falls's unmistakable figure, and they awaited him with hostile courtesy. Falls reached the line,

bowed, waited while a man might count three for the motion of a hand extended in welcome. There was none; they returned his bow with ceremonious stiffness, as he passed along the line.

In the hall behind the group a sudden silence, like a nipping frost, had fallen; laughter was hushed, and talking died to whispers. By a sort of mental telepathy, the knowledge of the scene in the hall—brief almost as a heart-beat—spread to the rooms beyond, and Watson saw throughout the entire suite the wavelike motion of heads turned toward the hall.

As Falls reached him, he turned to greet him with genial courtesy; even in this perturbed moment, Watson was careful to make the distinction between his ordinary manner and this more formal manner, which he conceived to be Falls's due. He welcomed him, not as the friend whom Falls had left a couple of hours ago, but as one of the hosts of the evening, with the courtesy due to a guest.

Bolling stood next Watson in the line, and, as Watson turned to him, Falls's hand still in his warm clasp, Bolling felt an imperative elbow admonish him at a point in his anatomy peculiarly susceptible to advice. He stepped up to Falls, gruffly genial. "A merry Christmas, Mr. Falls! Will you — er — pledge it?" He took, as he spoke, two glasses from the tray of a passing waiter, and tendered one to Falls, who accepted it, raised it to his lips an instant and returned it, and, with a cold bow, was passing on, when Watson laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Gentlemen," said Hugh, still in his grand manner, "if you will excuse me, I will go with Mr. Falls to greet .."

the ladies. I have not made my own greetings yet, and Mr. Falls has not met them all, I think."

They turned together to the first drawing-room, where a party of ladies were receiving. "Lord!" groaned Watson to himself, "I'd rather face an ambush of Stewart's 'Bloody Thirteen' than Mrs. Jones and the rest of those mothers in Israel! Ah, Al Manning's wife! She'll do. She's got brains in that pretty head of hers!"

Mrs. Eldridge-Jones stood first in the line of ladies, well forward, a distinguished figure clad in heavy, cream-colored satin, her white hair turned back in a full roll from her bold, angular face. The cold gleam of diamonds was everywhere about her, and the colder gleam of a satisfied malice shone in her insolent old eyes as she perceived Watson and his companion advancing upon the line of ladies. She turned to make a quick gesture of warning to the other women in the line; she was too clever a tactician to show in a position of individual responsibility. Her pose was the impregnable one of an exponent of public opinion; in the insult which she meant to level at Falls by a public refusal to recognize him socially, she was firmly resolved to have the support of every other woman in the line.

But Hugh's shrewd diagnosis of human mind and motive was a generic one, including women as well as men; he read the woman's tactics at a glance, and bent his keen, compelling glance upon her. She met it with as bold a one.

"Mrs. Jones," he said, with formal courtesy, as different as possible from Watson's usual genial ease, his menacing glance riveting his meaning upon her mind, "you have met my friend, Mr. Falls?"

Watson's tone was the assured tone of the man whose world recognizes him as a power; his glance, as arrogant as her own, was full of the freemasonry of caste which assumes as impossible the slightest divergence from its recognized laws.

The traditions of a lifetime, reinforced by the instincts of fifty years of social diplomacy, the ritual of conventionality,—to women of her class more binding than Holy Writ,—warned her to avert the scene which would follow her refusal to recognize Watson's friend, presented by himself, in a house where he was practically host; that, and a chastening vision of Henderson Jones's plebeian wrath when the inevitable explanation should ensue.

With consummate cleverness, she changed her course. She allowed herself to seem to waver — to be convinced, to generously yield the point, and handed her sword to Watson with the grace and dignity of one who, yielding only when she must, yet yields so tactfully as to convert defeat into a semblance of victory. She swept Falls a courtesy, gracious, if cold, murmuring a sentence of greeting.

But to the end of his life Watson never knew what it was those suave tones uttered. Falls engaged his attention to the exclusion of everything else. He stood erect, looking Mrs. Jones, who was a tall woman, squarely in the eyes, with a glance from under his drooping lids so full of studied insolence and deliberate, cold scorn for her and all she stood for that even Watson winced. Thus they faced each other for the space of a pulse-beat, these two strong natures with glances locked like blades in a silent interchange of hate, the impersonal living expression of an immutable prejudice. Then he bent his head to Mrs.

Eldridge-Jones in a bow so deep, so studied, as almost to savor of mockery.

They passed on down the line, and to each woman in turn Falls gave the tribute of a careless glance, a profound bow, a murmured word.

"Janie," whispered Hugh to the last lady in the line, a brisk and wholesome young matron, "Falls is a friend of mine; I want you to be nice to him, will you? Not *too* nice, you know. Falls is a lonesome old bachelor—like I've been, ever since you threw me over for Al Manning. Take Falls in hand, won't you? Tell him about the babies. He'll be tickled to death."

She led Falls away a moment later, making the circuit of the rooms with him, talking brightly and naturally, and, as she told Al that night, "liking him better every step I took."

She told Falls about her babies, and the precocious things they said. And Falls forgot how bored he was, and laughed down upon her with his boyish smile that so few people had seen.

"Why," said Janie to herself, "why, goodness me! I'm right sorry I'm married! He's simply lovely!"

Falls's height enabled him to follow Joan about the crowded rooms without trouble, and, in spite of himself, his eyes sought her again and again; he knew the man with her must be Caldwell.

"Joan is simply radiant to-night," said Janie, maliciously, as she detected one of Falls's covert glances.

"Perfect gown!" murmured Falls. "Light green suits Miss Adair to perfection."

"I said Joan," persisted Janie, a shrewd smile wrinkling her pretty eyes.

"I was making talk!" retorted Falls, at bay. "You do not give me credit for my honest intention to provide you with a subject upon which we might differ. There could be no difference of opinion where Miss Adair is concerned — her gown now!"

"I think the gown rather takes precedence — as far as unanimity of opinion is concerned," said Janie, serenely in possession of the information which Falls fondly dreamed he had concealed; and she dropped the subject.

"This is mine," Falls said five minutes later, standing beside Joan, where she and Caldwell sat snugly ensconced in a nook of the stairs under a nodding canopy of palms.

"I was waiting for you," she replied with a smile in the dimpled corners of her lips, though her eyes met his gravely.

She paused a moment to introduce the two men, who clasped hands with the perfunctory warmth men feel constrained to show when a woman introduces them; a word or two of talk passed between the two — each with a speculative eye on the other.

The first bars of the waltz were being played as Falls drew Joan away. "A whole one!" he reminded her, and she smiled her assent.

They were upon the floor of the ballroom; the music swept about them like a resistless current. Falls placed his arm about Joan to draw her out upon the tide of the waltz wailed forth by the violins. But in the very act a hand touched his arm, a courteous, stammering voice accosted him, a floor manager for the evening stood at his side, proffering him an open paper, the ink yet wet upon it.

As Falls paused involuntarily, in amazement, Stannifer

spoke: "Mr. Falls, I am requested by the committee to hand you a copy of the rules and to — er — to request you to leave the floor."

Jemmy Page, his handsome, boyish face flushed with embarrassment, stood bowing at Joan's side, his arm extended for her hand. It was evident that both he and Stannifer expected to see it transferred from Falls's arm to his, but Joan did not move.

"Thank you, Jemmy," she said icily; "as you see, I am engaged for this."

In the almost perfect stillness which had fallen upon the room, the wailing of the flutes and violins in the orchestra rose into a paean; the waltz had but been called, with only a couple here and there upon the floor, though the walls were lined with spectators; and in the drawing-rooms beyond, the hall, and the more distant card-rooms, every head was turned toward the little group of four. The tableau, during the brief second it lasted, was not only visible, but perfectly intelligible to every eye which beheld it.

The arrested waltz, the floor manager with the open paper in his hand, Falls's face of restrained anger, Joan's pale dismay, needed no commentary.

Falls had stood petrified for a second, then he said quietly, almost inaudibly: "Mr. Stannifer, I will ask you to stand aside."

"As you like, Mr. Falls; the committee will enforce its rules — not I."

"That being so — stand aside!" Stannifer courteously obeyed, and the next instant Falls had drawn his partner out upon the floor.

With trembling limbs and a heart bursting with in-

dignant pain, Joan mechanically kept step with Falls's strong turns in an unconscious obedience to his will and to the cadenced motion which was sweeping her along in a breathless whirl.

Falls felt her tremble in his arm, felt her light feet flag.

"Can you go through it," he whispered close at her ear, "for my sake?"

"Yes," she breathed, "it would not do to stop now."

Falls drew her imperceptibly farther within his arm, as she seemed to falter. "Lean on me," he said with gentle authority.

The floor was filling rapidly with waltzers, and Falls guided his partner mechanically among them, with eyes which saw but a dimpled shoulder and the triple row of pearls upon Joan's throat. He was not thinking—not yet. He was hoarding each moment as it flew, gloating as a miser upon his gold. He was conscious of the wall of hostile faces hemming him in, of the dull murmur of voices which discussed him, the public insult offered him, only as of the sound of distant breakers which threatened to snatch from him this girl within his arms. He had a dull sense of impending loss; almost he could feel Joan slipping from him. That yielding form upon his breast, that soft cheek blanched with pain for him,—how could he let her go?

Involuntarily he tightened his arm about her. "I'm going after this dance," he whispered, "and I have to start to-morrow for New York. I shall not see you again before I go. Will you say good-by to me now, here?"

"Good-by," she said, with a fleeting glance from eyes that had the still radiance of the winter stars outside.

"Here is Judge Adair. Shall I leave you with him?" As the old man drew his daughter's hand into his arm, he offered his other hand to Falls.

"You are such a stranger, Mr. Falls," he said smiling, "that I am never just sure if it is greeting or good-by, but I feel that it is always in order to shake hands."

"It is good-by this time; I am just leaving."

Hallett stood with Watson and Caldwell in the group about Judge Adair; they had been in earnest talk, which Joan's advent with Falls had arrested. A nondescript greeting passed between Falls and Hallett; but Caldwell offered his hand to Falls with a cordial clasp. There was a warm light of liking upon both faces — in Caldwell's an expression half-amused, half-speculative, as well.

"You have dropped your rose," he said to Joan, as the loosened rose in her hair tumbled to the floor, and stooped instantly for the rose himself. But Falls was quicker and held the prize high above Caldwell's head in teasing triumph.

"It is mine," cried Caldwell, "by all the laws of salvage!"

"Hark to the judicial mind!" laughed Hugh. "Hear him spin the cobweb of the law across the path of ultimate resort!"

Caldwell still smiled, but there was a touch of chagrin in his eyes.

"I have not the judicial mind," said Falls, "but — I have the rose!"

XVI

THE VERDICT

"COME to my place and smoke, Falls," said Hugh, joining Falls upon the steps; "it's too late to go to the power-house, and too early for bed."

"Yes," said Falls absently; "I was coming."

They walked in silence for half a block, their steps ringing clearly upon the pavement.

"You heard of that—trouble there to-night, Challie?"

"Oh, yes; I would that I could have spared you it, Falls! A man gave me a tip, but too late to avert it. It was all fixed up, you know."

"Just what am I to understand by it, if you know, Watson?"

Watson linked his arm with Falls's, paused, cleared his throat, as though he had been going to debate, paused again, unable to go on.

"Well?"

"I'm not really a brute—"

"Go on."

"It was simply an excuse to force your resignation from the club, Falls; that, and the public insult. I looked into it at once; it was all perfectly regular; rules all signed by the committee and countersigned by Pugh. 'No man not escorting a lady'—a stag, you know—could go upon the floor—"

"Preposterous! I saw twenty! You waltzed yourself, Watson."

"Of course the rule was not intended to be enforced; it was made only to make the fellows come to the scratch and get the girls there. It was given out unofficially; not put upon the bulletin board until ten minutes before you got your copy. Stannifer told me it knocked the breath out of him when Pugh signed the copy for you."

"What's to do about it—except kick the men who put it up?"

"You'd have to find 'em first, Falls. They were mighty scarce about there to-night, I can tell you! I did all there is to do before I left. Filed your resignation, together with my own, Judge Adair's, and Caldwell's—Here, let go er me, Falls! Don't you go hugging me here in 'de day's broad light!'"

"But this is great, Watson! Judge Adair, and Caldwell! What can I have done to merit their—their—" He paused, at a loss for a word.

"There was Joan, you know; that gave color to their resignations; but I never saw Uncle John so angry! I thought he'd go all the way out to Hillcrest after that old sword of his—covered all over with Yankee blood—to run Tom Evert through with!" Hugh shouted with laughter at the recollection.

They walked on, Falls's arm still about Watson's shoulders.

"You know what took me there to-night, Watson, do you not?"

"To waltz with Joan. But why should you not go, Gregory? You are a member of the Dixie Club."

"The waltz, of course, would have taken me anywhere;

but I could have denied myself the pleasure, great as it was, had I dreamed the punishment in store for me would rebound upon her in the way it did. Cowards! And I cannot move in the matter—I cannot drag her name into it!"

"No."

"I went there deliberately to assert my rights — my social rights, I mean, not my rights in the club. I intend," he continued with cold deliberation, "I intend to fight this ostracism, Hugh; not that I value an *entrée* to Adairville's society —" Falls broke off with a cool, brief laugh; "but because it debars me from much that I *do* care for! All that I care for most," he added, after a moment, deliberately; "for in time—I am getting to see this more clearly every day—in time this prejudice, madness, this poisonous emanation from the grave of the past, may separate me from—her. . . . In a tender nature like"—he paused, steadied his grave voice—"like Joan's, environment, early influences, prenatal influences really, the love of home and friends and kin—these strike their roots deep. I could not if I would—and I would not—unwind her heart-strings from among them. Mine must encompass both—her heart, I mean, and all that it holds dear. You see," he turned to Hugh, "you see, Watson, why I must make this fight for social recognition here? I am fighting for standing-room beside Joan, that is all. That and one other thing."

Falls lifted his face to the cold fires of the stars above his head—the great, white-enameled stars which burn over Dixie; that saw it drip with the red horror of blood for four long years; watched its slow writhing under the surgeon's knife of reconstruction, and saw it gather its

maimed parts together in a new birth, born anew of the spirit, not of the sword this time—as he continued:

“I have, as any man has, my own happiness to look out for; to win, as other men, the woman I love. And I have her happiness as well to care for. You see that, Hugh? And I must have time! Time to wear out this insane opposition.

“I would not declare my love—ask her to share my life—as things are here,” he continued proudly. “It galled me like the devil to have to accept their pity—Caldwell’s and her father’s—”

“You mistake the position, Falls,” said Watson gravely; “they came to your support through a sense of fair play, not pity. . . . Come in, while I get a light.”

“Am I sleeping here again to-night?” asked Falls in surprise, as Watson closed and locked the outer door, and then turned to lock the hall door.

“Yes; you ’d just as well. Your things are here. The Honorable Peter Lacey Jackson has taken you in charge, I see.”

“How ’d that trial go off this morning, Watson? I have been so busy all day I could not get off; and everything seemed so quiet—the thing seems to have blown over—eh?”

“Oh, it was quiet, deadly quiet! Well—” Watson yawned and laughed. He had divested himself of his coat and waistcoat; he walked about the room while he told of the trial.

“Well—we went to trial, with the sheriff and four or five deputies and forty-two soldiers of the Alabama National Guard lined up in the court-house guarding the

prisoners. Poor devils, they were ashy with fear. The black ones get about the color of these ashes in my pipe; the yellow ones, like Will-Henry, turn green; they were all of that. We had to get a jury first—we had a special venire of sixty, county men most of them. There was the usual fight over them. McClung and I—McClung's the prosecuting attorney, pretty fair lawyer. He'd been out at Hillcrest dancing all night, and could hardly keep his eyes open. He'd just as well have laid down on a bench and had his nap out. I weeded out all the ex-Confederate soldiers, and their sons and grandsons; and McClung went for the niggers and the Republicans—there were two or three of each—and then we had n't any more challenges. But we had got a hanging jury. I saw it in their damned old eyes! Tony asked 'em in great shape the usual questions—if they had their minds already made up—I nearly laughed right out in court! Minds made up? Why, men of that sort in this State have their minds made up fifty years before they are born, on all questions concerning a nigger, and set like the tension of a typewriter when it comes from the factory.

"But they said no, and that they would convict on circumstantial evidence. They might as well have added, 'or without it,' but Tony forgot to ask that.

"And at last we got down to business; I made my motion for a severance, and Tony let 'er go. Named Charlton Finn to defend Sledge. The State had Sledge on the stand, but I got him later on the cross-examination. He bungled and lied and contradicted himself nigger way, you know; he never saw Will-Henry in his life until they met here in jail—and I made him say so."

Watson gazed meditatively into the fire.

"There was not a scintilla of proof against Will-Henry, first nor last —"

"You got him off!" cried Falls exultantly.

"A-w naw, Falls, naw! Ur nigger, charged with killing a white man — in Holmes County! Nothing on earth or in heaven could have got him off, I tell you!"

"I summed up the evidence — made the jury a fair talk; we looked each other in the eye for fifteen minutes — not a shadow of proof against my client, mind you! But — I knew he was a gone 'coon! Tony charged 'em on the law straight and fair — oh, yes, he knows! There is n't a better lawyer in Alabama than Cruikshanks. It's not brains Tony is lacking in —"

"What is it?" asked Falls curiously. "Somehow I can't like the fellow, and he's a pleasant animal, too."

"The hypercritical call it principle," said Hugh dryly. "Well," — he paused to laugh, a big laugh of sheer amusement, — "the jury was out exactly three minutes, and brought in a verdict of murder in the first degree against 'em both."

"The devil!" cried Falls.

"Naw," drawled Hugh; "not the devil; a nigger-hat-ing Holmes County, Alabama, jury!"

"What's the difference?" demanded Falls, with such scandalized indignation that Watson laughed again.

"Mighty little — when it comes to a nigger client."

"How did it end?"

"'Tis n't ended yet," said Hugh slowly. "I made a motion for a new trial; Tony was all serene. I'd a good mind to take Billy by the ear and lead him out with me — in the face of their d—— tin soldiers!"

"Where is Will-Henry," asked Falls, "now?"

"Holmes County jail, waiting his new trial."

"When will it come off? Is it the superior court?
Who is judge of it?"

"God knows!" said Watson, with weary sarcasm. "It
is the court of last appeal; and they say it takes cog-
nizance of the fall of a swallow, but — ur nigger? Poor
devil!"

XVII

THE MOB

SLOWLY Watson emerged from the purple depths of sleep to find Falls at his side, his heavy hand upon him, his voice, tense with excitement, in his ear.

“Watson! Wake up, man! There’s the devil of a row on down-town! Listen to ‘em! There’s firing! I’m going—”

“Naw,” drawled Hugh drowsily, “naw, you’re not, Falls. Not if I know it, and I think I do.”

“Not?” laughed Falls, a ring of gaiety in his voice that Watson had never heard there before. “Not, eh? You just wait until I get something on me in place of these silk rags! They’re fighting, I tell you! Not any old, moldy Rebel ghosts, either! Those are live guns!”

“A-w, blank cartridges—in pop-guns. I was in hopes you’d sleep through this mess, Greg. Don’t you know what that is? They’re hanging those niggers; that’s a bona-fide, howling, sweating, dirty Southern mob, and the choicest Holmes County brand!”

Falls was heaping wood and coal upon the almost extinguished fire. “Get up and dress, Watson. No; I’m not going back to bed. I’m going to dress and go down there. A pack of dirty cowards!”

Watson groaned in comical dismay. “A nice job I’ve

got ahead of me!" he soliloquized, as he turned reluctantly out upon the cold floor.

"What can you do, going down there, Falls? There are three or four hundred men there, armed, and drunk with moonshine whiskey and the lust of blood."

Falls was leaning far out of the window. "Come here, Hugh. What is that pounding, smashing?" He turned resolutely within. "I've got to see this thing; hearing won't do for me!"

Watson was dressing rapidly. "Sit down a minute, Falls. Listen to what I've got to say, will you? After, if you *will* go, why, I'll go with you — you don't go alone!"

Falls paused, impatiently.

"This thing's been gathering all day — pooh, what difference did that fool trial make? They were as good as dead yesterday. I only got it up to quiet you. And I brought you here to sleep because it's farther from this rumpus at the jail than the hotel, — and besides, the truth is, Greg, I've taken quite a lot of pains to produce the impression that you went East on that midnight train. I had Lacey pack you a bag and leave it with the clerk to meet the train. There was a spy in the hotel lobby, you know. Don't make a light here! Those windows have no blinds."

The dancing firelight filled the room, and Hugh passed about pulling down shades; he came at last to where Falls still sat upon the table, impatiently waiting.

Watson paused before him, his hands in his trousers pockets, his face grave.

"Now, you listen to me, Greg, a minute. I know this blamed old town! I've eased her through lots of scrapes

since I 've been a man, and had to stand aside lots of times and see her bust her way to the devil! She 's doing that to-night, and I 've got to stand aside. Any influence which I might have ordinarily won't be worth a continental damn to-night; my sort is the sort which appeals to a man's mind, you know,—influences, convinces,—along that line. Those men out there, that you hear howling and smashing in that jail — those men are not men. They are brute beasts, and mad for blood like any other!"

He walked a pace away, came back, laid his hands upon Falls's shoulders.

"I 've been dodging this all day — dodging telling you, but it 's got to be told. The fact is, Falls, you 're bracketed in the town's mind with this nigger, Will-Henry. You remember the street-car trouble? All this has grown out of it — or the town chooses to see it that way. There are a hundred chances to one that, if you are thought to be out of town,— what with the two negroes to glut the mob's appetite for blood this time,— you will not be molested; but if you should be mad enough to go, or I mad enough to let you go, upon the streets to-night, let the crowd see you, hear your voice, find you opposed to them, and no power on earth could save you. I could go under with you — I could not save you!"

Falls started up, shook Watson's hands from his shoulders, thrust him off. Almost it seemed to Hugh that he saw the man for the first time, so changed was he. His somber eyes were aglow with wrath, his stern lips curved into a smile of fierce scorn and derision.

"And do you suppose," he cried, his voice shaken with anger almost too profound for utterance — "do you sup-

pose that I shall skulk here, in hiding, and let that miserable negro suffer for any fault of mine? *I put him in the place he held.* I held him there by force, when the poor wretch begged and prayed to go. Is he to hang for my act? It was bad enough when I thought — I supposed — it was but the natural barbarism of this place let loose under the guise of race prejudice. But — you amaze me, Hugh, with talk of this sort!"

He passed into his room, snatching up his long coat, and, without ceremony, on into Watson's chamber, searching tables and drawers. "I want a pistol, Watson, and some cartridges. Come, like a dear fellow, and get them for me. I 'm in no danger, Challie, from that cowardly rabble. One man with a gun, and decent nerve, can stand off the whole lot of hysterical cowards. Alabama mob? the devil! All mob-stuff everywhere is the same. Alabama or Springfield, Calcutta or Central America — it 's the punk of the world. Rotten fungus that an honest kick will smash."

Watson got the pistols and cartridges and gave them to him, but when Falls reached the outer door he found Watson with his back against it, calmly awaiting him.

Falls paused, arrested, and the two stood eye to eye in a silent battle of the strong.

Falls's brows met in a frown of intense annoyance, but he spoke gently, almost caressingly:

"Don't be a fool, Challie; I 'm going."

"No," said Hugh, without his drawl this time; "no, you 're not, Falls. Not through this door, anyhow."

Falls turned, placing the pistols high out of reach of either upon the cornice, thrust away the chair, and turned back toward Hugh. He was pale and fiercely determined,

but intense repugnance shone from his eyes, bent his troubled brow. He made a step toward Hugh, who calmly held the door, bracing his sturdy back against it, but otherwise making no sign or motion of resistance.

"I'm getting rather bored with leading-strings, Hugh," said Falls dryly. "I've been out of pinafores for quite a bit."

"You'd prefer a shroud — a bloody one?"

"Pooh! Well, Challie, if you will have it —"

His heavy grasp fell upon Hugh, swayed him fiercely to one side. Hugh wavered, staggered a step, caught himself, and with a spring regained his position in front of the door. Again and again Falls thrust him back — and again and again Hugh sturdily resisted. Falls strove in silence, twining his supple form about Hugh's bear-like frame, bending his great shoulders like a ram against his side, the muscles of his broad chest straining, his long arms laced about Watson, wrestling like Laocoön.

No faintest sign of anger betrayed itself upon either face; upon Falls's was a hard determination, as he still strove to twist Hugh from his place. As well might he have striven to uproot some earth-locked boulder from its bed in the Cumberland's deep bosom!

Suddenly, as they still strove in grim silence, broken only by their panting breath coming in gusts between set teeth, the grinding of their feet upon the entry floor, the rattling and straining of the disputed doorway — the telephone bell rang sharply.

"See who it is, Falls," said Watson coolly.

Falls had involuntarily dropped his hold and leaned panting beside Hugh, who calmly held his position in front of the door.

Still breathing quickly, Falls took up the receiver. Watson saw him start, bend eagerly to the tube, and, when he spoke a moment later, Hugh knew, without further telling, who held the wire at the other end. Falls was speaking in a voice scarce above a whisper, a tremble catching his deep tones in spite of the restraint he put upon himself.

"Do not you know who this is? It's Gregory."

Then Watson strolled away from the door.

"Oh," came softly to his ear, in answer to his name—"is it—you? How glad I am! I thought—I feared—Promise me you will stop there—will not go upon the street. Promise!"

"Give me a moment to think," said Falls. He leaned against the lintel of the door, his brows furrowed in harassed thought. Watson saw the struggle in his face, the wrench with which he yielded. "Joan—are you there? Yes? Tell me just what it is you wish me to do."

"Not to go upon the street, and not to leave Hugh."

"I promise. What? . . . Oh! Good-by."

Falls did not turn immediately to Watson, but rested his forehead upon his arm against the wall.

Watson was looking out of the window, smoking, as Falls threw off his coat and hat; neither made any reference to Falls's change of plan. Falls sat beside him at the window, lighted his cigar by Hugh's pipe, and together they smoked in silence.

From the third-story window they had a clear view of the streets converging toward the Court-house Square; they lay wide, empty, and white under the mingled light of the stars and the arc-lights.

The clock in the tower of the court-house solemnly struck two, trailing a long echo through the thin air that was presently lost in the strident clamor of the mob which came from the direction of the jail two blocks away. Then came the muffled boom of wood crashing upon wood, followed by a resonant clang, as of some heavy body falling. The deep murmur of voices rose into a brief cheer, rose and fell and rose again when the splitting crash resounded through the night.

"They 're breaking in the jail doors to fire the inside — to smoke out the soldiers," said Hugh.

"Soldiers inside? Why are they not about the entrance, holding these men off?"

Watson blew a long thread of smoke into the air, watching it float off into the darkness like a pale, writhing ghost. "What can eighty-four tin soldiers, with blank cartridges, do against four hundred armed men?"

"Do you mean to tell me," cried Falls, laying an imperative hand upon the other's arm, "do you mean to say that nothing really will be done to prevent this outrage?"

"There will be some show of force, yes. I suppose Ainsley will look after his job. He 'll do enough to stave off impeachment. You see, Ainsley is rather up a tree; his son, Bob Ainsley, is leading this mob. It is n't likely Ainsley 's going to give troops an order to fire on his own son!"

"The governor can get troops here in two hours."

Watson calmly knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"This will be over in thirty minutes. And besides, I understand the telegraph wire is out of order — long distance, too."

He laughed grimly, as Falls turned to stare at him, amazed at the cool effrontery of the way in which this thing was being carried through.

"How dare a Western Union operator—"

"Bigeloe 's got a pretty wife here — couple of babies — she was a home girl; he don't want to be run out of 'Dairville; and electrical currents *do* disarrange wires sometimes!"

"Jiminy!" cried Falls, the puritanical oaths of his boyhood coming naturally to his lip, as there stirred in him the old, stern New England standards of human liberty. "This beats out all creation!"

"They 're coming," said Watson, leaning out and pointing to where a column of smoke rose, wavering, against the sky. "They 've got about ten pounds of sulphur in that old feather-bed smeared with tar. No human lungs could breathe it five minutes without bursting."

The first dark fringes of the rabble showed at the top of the hill; straggling, retreating, advancing, like the spine-like antennæ of a gigantic insect, whose body was the black mass below the hill.

A wave of sound came with the crowd, keeping pace with it; a deep murmur pierced by quick orders, broken by strident laughter, more appalling, considering the time and the errand, than a curse. The ringing tramp of footsteps upon the frozen ground beat time to its advance. A vague, indefinable body of sound hung like a cloud about the moving mass.

The crowd moved in two sections: a compact mass, dark and silent, which held the middle of the street; and a loose, noisy, shifting fringe which hung upon the pavements. From this latter came the quick patter of women's

feet—the flutter of their gowns—the shrill calls and shriller laughter of their voices.

“Women, too!” muttered Falls.

Watson had left the window, busied about something within the room. Falls did not see with what, until Hugh’s voice called to him guardedly. He held in his hand some garments of strange make and unaccustomed aspect to Falls’s eyes.

“Put on this old hunting-coat of mine, and turn up the collar. And this ‘coon-skin cap—”

“Challie,” murmured Falls in remonstrance, “don’t make an ass of me!”

But he put on the coat and the cap. Watson stood by, regarding him, when he was attired, with an odd gravity not unmixed with admiration.

“Jove, Falls!” he cried, “how you look the part!”

He drew him into the bedroom, turned the light on by the mirror, and pushed Falls in front of the glass. “Do you know what you have on?” he asked. “That’s my father’s ‘coon-skin cap; he was a captain in the Raccoon Roughs. No, you would n’t, you know! It’s only local history; but”—he stroked the cap tenderly—“if every one of these absurd rings was a quartered ‘scutcheon of nobility, I could not be prouder of it than I am!”

He gazed at Falls’s reflection in the mirror; his dark face, his somber eyes, the grave, noble presence of the man, lent itself to the rough garb he wore as noble words to some homely martial ballad.

“I think you are all right now,” he added, as they returned to the window. “If any one notices you, they will take you for one of my Pine Barren constituency.”

The scene below had changed when they looked forth again. At the junction of the four streets below the window where the two looked down, the crowd had opened, spreading itself like a ragged coverlid upon the open space. Under the arc-light, swung in the center of the space, the whole scene was illumined as if by a noonday sun, except where the shadow of the framework fell. About it men moved here and there, like quick, moving shadows, silently, busily. The crowd was quiet, too; only that indefinable murmur hung like a rustling curtain about the huddled masses; nothing moved except those dark, hurrying figures about the patch of shadow which lay, like the pupil of a sinister eye, in the white, unwinking stare of the streets.

In the intense stillness Falls spoke cautiously, pointing downward: "I don't see any gallows—or rope; do you?"

"Limb of a tree; over there in the Court-house Square."

They watched in silence a moment longer; and Falls's hand fell in a grip of steel upon the other man's arm.

"God in heaven! Watson, see—see what those fiends are doing! There—in that patch of shade!"

As Watson strained his eyes into the gloom, a ringing blow of steel on steel smote the night; another and another in rhythmic accent, as sledge-hammers swung aloft by practised hands smote the head of a stake held upright in the center of the spot of shade. A spike or heavy bar of iron was being driven into the center of that black altar, deep into the frozen ground. And now men seemed to rise from the solid earth to huddle in motionless expectancy; while others yet, seeming to drip from that black mass of violence like noisome ooze from some

putrid body, flitted forward, laden with logs, with pine knots, with empty barrels and boxes. Upon the awful quiet which had fallen like a pall upon the waiting crowds, the homely sound of splitting wood fell sharply. With incredible swiftness a V-shaped pyre arose about the base of the stake.

"God!" moaned Falls, his hand gripping hard the sill beside him, his strong teeth set, "is this hell—or Dixie?"

Down below a pause ensued—a question passed from lip to lip; a man ran across the open street and tried a shop-door, tried another, called back something of which the only words audible were, "Bust 'er in!"

"Coal oil!" said Watson.

It was quickly forthcoming. A woman's voice rose shrilly; a woman's form leaned over the low balcony above a small store, in her hand a bright tin can. "He-ah," she drawled, and the strident sound smote to the farthest confines of the waiting crowds, over which a shudder swept, like the dumb moaning of the pines upon a windless day; "he-ah 's er can er coal ile. I kin he'p erlong that much to burn th' black brute!" A man climbed up for it, and sped back to the waiting ministers about that black altar of human sacrifice.

"Come, Gregory," said Watson, his hand on the sash, "let 's shut 'er down."

"No," he said in a hard voice; "no, I 'll see this through. I 've seen all the evil that the sun sets on—from Calcutta to the Klondike, but this is the first time—the first time—" His voice broke in a hard shudder, his strong hand gripping the window shook.

"Sledge!" exclaimed Watson, as a dark form, huddled and lurching, held upright by the hands which grasped

him, was thrust between the open ends of the V-shaped pyre; the ends were closed so that he stood upright against the bar, the heaped wood reaching to his waist. In the hush, the hollow rattle of the chain was heard, turn on turn, binding the victim to the stake. The bright can flashed as it was lifted high; the acrid odor of coal oil filled the air as it was poured over Sledge's huge black form, naked to the waist, in a baptism of hate.

A faint blue streak pierced the gloom as a man struck a match upon the rough cloth of his trousers, and a thin column of smoke rose; it widened, swayed here and there; a blue flame trembled a moment at the victim's knees, turned to rose, then green, and, bursting into a sheet of blinding radiance, wrapped him in a winding-sheet of pure white flame. For one moment, through a rift in the curtain of flame, Sledge's face was seen, heavy, bestial, his dull gaze uplifted in dumb agony and unconscious appeal — upward to where the great cross on the spire of the Church of the Brotherhood of Christ shone, alien, among the stars.

Then from that huddled mass, as from one parched and gasping throat, a hoarse shout rose. A curse, a groaning prayer, in one. An insensate howl of the brutal lust of blood; one long, fierce imprecation uttered by the incarnate voice of an ancestral hate. It rose upon the startled night, and sunk to shuddering silence. Rose again, swelling in fierce tumult over the sleeping town; beating in waves of hideous discord against the mountain walls about it, which hastened to join the tumult with hoarse-voiced echo in savage antiphonal.

The crowd broke, surging more closely about the black pyre, where hung in chains the flaccid body of Sledge,

without sound or motion, wrapped in a pall of sooty smoke, pierced by leaping tongues of flame.

No sound, no faintest sign or motion; no prayer, no groan, no curse, had come from behind that black curtain.

Sledge's soul, like a spark struck vainly in the night, had been quenched by the hand which had lighted its brief candle; reclaimed by the Power which had struck it forth.

XVIII

A LIFE FOR A LIFE

THE pillar of smoke rose some twenty or forty feet above the stake, where it encountered a lateral current of the air, and, extending itself, spread like a canopy above the scene, cutting off the diffused light of the stars with a heavy screen of opaque gloom, beneath which the arc-lights glowed with the iridescent brilliance of giant glowworms.

Falls quietly laid his hand upon his companion. "I 'm going to show you something; don't say anything. Do you see that fellow — there, to the left — with the piece of white wood in his hand?"

"Andy Caruthers!"

Falls leaned far out, drawing Hugh with him, until they could see down the wall of the building in which they were to the pavement, they themselves being invisible in the gloom.

It was a corner building of three stories, built of gray stone, with its main entrance upon the pavement just below the window from which the two men leaned. A roomy vestibule led from the street to the entrance door, guarded where it abutted upon the pavement by heavy iron gates, rusty from disuse.

The creaking of these gates had drawn Falls's eyes downward to rest upon a sight which caused him to start

with amazement. Half a dozen men were dragging a prostrate form along the ground to this entrance. They had thrust the man within, and swung to the heavy gates before the meaning of the scene had flashed upon Falls.

Will-Henry! It was Will-Henry whom they had thrust within the shelter of the doorway for temporary safe-keeping! More sure was he, as he saw one of the men fling down a coil of rope upon the pavement, selecting one of their number to hold the gate before he, too, sauntered off to join the crowd.

As they disappeared in the crowds about the stake, Falls called Watson's attention.

"Look at that fellow they 've left to guard him. See what he means to do. Ah — hah, I thought so!"

Caruthers tried the stout billet in his hand across his knee; it resisted; he glanced along its length and, stepping to the gateway, thrust it through the staples, and, turning carelessly, melted into the mass of people who, like iron filings about a magnet, drew inward toward that black pillar of smoke.

Falls started up, and with a stride reached the corner where he had placed the pistols. As he reached the floor after securing them, Watson stood at his side. Not supplicating this time. He stood haughtily erect and looked Falls over with a glance of cutting surprise. When he spoke, it was with a formal courtesy. "I thought," he said slowly, "that you were under promise, Mr. Falls? I could not avoid overhearing your conversation with Joan, and I so construed it."

Falls was counting out the cartridges upon the table into two piles: "Six,—I am, Hugh,—seven, eight; this is a plenty. I 'll borrow back my pistol, if you don't

mind, Hugh? It suits my hand, and you can use this one of yours better." He was loading them as he spoke, his deft fingers pushing the little cylinders home with urgent haste. He slipped the surplus cartridges into Hugh's pocket, who paid no heed but stood in haughty silence, waiting Falls's attention — and took up his own.

"The terms of the promise were, Hugh, that I was to stay with you; not to leave you — I am doing that."

"Sophistry," said Watson quietly, and a flush sprang to Falls's cheek. He did not speak for a second, but when he lifted his glance to Hugh's it was alight with a frank and noble simplicity.

"Challie," he said, the boyish name coming unconsciously to his lips, as it had often done of late, "this conflict — I 've been fighting it over there for thirty minutes — is as old as Adam, and the first woman. How I keep that promise concerns only myself — and another. That other will judge, and I will accept her decision."

He laid Watson's pistol upon the table, took up his own and turned to the door. Watson passed through it at his side. As he did so, Falls thrust an arm through his, and together they made their way down the unlighted passage. Falls turned back from the stairs, rushed into the rooms they had just left, and returned with another pair of glasses, which he thrust upon Hugh.

"For fear the others should get broken," he panted; "I don't want you putting a ball in my back! Hugh, are you on — "

"A-w," said Watson, in bored resignation, "a-w, get out! I saw Andy five minutes before you did — and that coil of rope on the pavement. Yes, I do think it feasible. If I had n't, I should not have budged nor let you.

What 's ur nigger compared to" — the last words came with a rush — "to you, Greg!"

Watson's suite of rooms extended the whole length of the building, which had a side entrance at the far end opening upon a side street. The halls and stairways were in perfect darkness, as the two young men made their way downward to the ground floor.

"What did you say was in here, Hugh?" asked Falls, as he bent with a match in his hand to inspect the lock upon the door at the rear end of the ground floor.

"It 's a warehouse for machinery, hardware, reapers, — stuff of that sort — "

"If she 's not full up, so hard against the door it can't be opened, it 'll be the very thing. This is just a plain lock. Stand back a bit, Challie."

Falls put his shoulder against the door. The wood strained, the panels sprung, the knob hung loosely in the broken lock, — but the door resisted. Outside, deadened by the distance, a deep roar rose, — the first sound the mob had made since that initial groan.

"There is a bar," said Falls. "The jambs must go! On that side, Hugh. Now, together!"

With a splitting crash the facings of the door gave way; the door itself lurched inward, swayed aside, and fell.

"If 't was n't for that row outside — " panted Hugh.

"They 'll never hear. Come on — or wait. You know where the vault is — and the way out. I 'll pass him through to you."

"Yes; I think he 'll mind me."

The warehouse was loosely packed with heavy machinery of all sorts, as Watson had surmised. It was distributed without attempt at classification or arrangement, and

Falls made his way with infinite difficulty through it, until his hand, after what had seemed to him an interval of hours, rested upon the lock of the outer door which opened upon the pavement, and behind whose iron gates Will-Henry lay upon the tiled floor of the vestibule. Instantly Falls found the key; the heavy door swung inward on well-oiled hinges without a sound. But he might as well have battered it open with a maul, for all the attention it would have attracted in the uproar without. The crowd had surged across the lighted space to the Court-house Square. Montgomery was speaking from the steps. His voice, pitched to a note of maudlin pathos, pleaded with the mob in behalf of law and order. A line of soldiers came at a quickstep along the open street, and as Falls cast a hurried glance without, a flame sprang across the width of the street, a sharp, simultaneous discharge shook the air; they were firing pointblank at the mob at twenty paces. The mob answered the volley with hoots of derision, with yelling laughter, and cries of, "Spitballs! Spitballs!"

Turning upon the line of militia, they closed with the soldiers, wresting their useless guns away; the soldiers, yielding them with laughter, and with hands in their empty cartridge-belts, strolled into the yelling crowd.

The miserable heap upon the floor at Falls's feet was as insensible as the maddened mob without. Falls leaned without the doorway. Will-Henry lay almost beyond his reach, but he succeeded in grasping a portion of his ragged clothing, drew him nearer, tightened his grip, lifted the man to his knees, dragged him upright, and drew him within. The door was in the act of closing upon the two when a breathless gasp fell upon Falls's ear; four round

eyes, bright with mischief, gleamed upon him through the grating, two pairs of ragged shoes scuttled along the pavement.

"Gee!" cried a boy's voice from about the level of Falls's trousers-pocket, "ef de 'lectric-light man ain't dun stole dat ar nigger fum de mob!"

"Can you stand up? Do it, then; don't say a word, just follow me," said Falls to the limp bundle he held upright against the door.

As though electrified into a new life by the firm grip of Falls's hand, Will-Henry rose and stood erect. Hope filled him like a potent cordial, and he followed nimbly as Falls began his tortuous return, working his way through the masses of heavy freight which lined the space toward the rear of the building where the broken doorway showed, a faint blot of light against the deeper darkness within.

The noises outside had dropped to a confused blur of sound, broken now by a swift rush of feet upon the hollow pavement, followed by an indistinguishable clamor of protest — by yelling laughter.

"Those little scoundrels have got it told by this," thought Falls. "There will be a rush to the other end in a minute."

Hardly had the thought formed itself in his brain when a deeper roar of wrath, of surprise, of vengeance, shook the building.

Within Falls paused, measuring the distance to be traversed before the rear door leading up out of the warehouse could be made; he looked down at his trembling charge about to sink at his feet — and his grave face broke into a sudden laugh — the situation was so utterly prepos-

terous. Outside that savage mob, within two men and this limp fragment of humanity!

When the rear door yielded, Falls had half-unconsciously picked up the stout bar of iron which had been used to secure it, and carried it in his hand when he opened the door through which he had dragged the negro. With an instinct of caution he had darted without and rammed it hard home through the iron stanchions of the gates into the stonework at the sides. He knew that it would hold unless the solid masonry should be torn away. He did not fear attack in the rear, and he made his way forward through the darkness toward the opening, dragging Will-Henry with him. His hand, feeling his way, touched Watson on the breast.

"They 're at the side door," said Watson calmly, "but there 's no need to worry; in that narrow entry, with that sharp turn at the stairs —"

"We 'll just heave a few reapers and things across that opening. Take hold, Watson!"

"Here, you 're not taking me for a derrick — or some sort of hydraulic lift, are you?"

Through the dusk Hugh saw the flash of Falls's white teeth in the laugh with which he answered. Where had gone Falls's repelling gravity and icy reserve? asked Hugh to himself. Gone — Falls was as frankly, as boyishly gay as though he and Watson had been two lads of ten building a sand fort across the mouth of a purling stream.

"That 's a good place for Will-Henry over there under that eight-legged thing." He turned. "Get under!" he said to the negro, with the peremptory gentleness which he might have used to a favorite setter, and Will-Henry, nothing loath, dived under.

"Naw," said Watson, "that won't do; come out, Billy. You see," he went on to Falls, "Billy has a right to defend his life. Give him a pistol. Now, if shooting has to be done, the three of us shoot together, and, if any damage is done — why, 't is Billy did it! Eh, Billy?"

He turned his brilliant, rallying smile upon the negro, who moved his stiff lips faintly in a heart-sick grin.

They stood just within the barricade which Falls had reared across the opening, waiting in silence which pieced minute to minute into a lengthening chain of wonder to the men within. They could scarce see one another, and the heavy stone walls of the building deadened the sounds without. Almost would they have thought the mob withdrawn, except that about them was that same dim sense of the presence of a mass of living men, — a deep breathing — a subdued movement of restless bodies.

As often happens in moments of intense mental strain or danger, the minds of the three men waiting within — muscles strung, forms rigid, senses alert — slipped the leash of the present, busying themselves each with some trifle, as a wave waiting to engulf the shore may lick a bright-hued pebble in its path.

The negro, plucked but a moment since from the noose which lay coiled like a python before his eyes and waiting to choke the life from out his body, thought only of how hungry he was.

"Gawd," he moaned, nodding with fatigue and weakness above the useless pistol in his hand, "I'se shore hongry! Lawdy, don't I wisht I had er piece er M'lindy's cawn bread an' bakin — ur even er 'tater!"

Falls looked through the dusk at his two companions with a thoughtful smile. He had noted Watson's uncon-

scious adoption of the name by which he had called the negro in their vanished boyhood. He saw that the years had dropped from them both, like the folds of an encumbering garment; they were boys again on the common back of Hillcrest, playing marbles, punching heads, in the glorious freemasonry of youth.

Never, in all of his "bawned days" had Will-Henry profaned his freedman's lips by calling any white man master; but in this new stress of fear and desperate mischance, from the black shadow of the gallows, hereditary instinct woke and answered to the call in both. Watson was "Marst Hugh," Billy was Watson's "nigger." *No-blesse oblige!*

"Where are they!" exclaimed Falls at last, in wonder. Watson glanced about him, without answer, at the heavy stone walls of the unfinished basement (which had been designed for a vault, but was being used as a warehouse pending the completion of the building), at the long, narrow space, finally at the narrow entry—the broken doorway.

"Dey dun gorn fur de baid," said Will-Henry, from out his bitter experience of an hour before. "Dey lef' hit at de jail; 'spect dey gine smoke us out some mo'!"

"Sure!" cried Falls, with sudden enlightenment. "That 's the game, Hugh. But they 'll have to come inside to do it," he added with grim significance. "The wind is straight down that street out there—"

"I see!" said Hugh, a sudden horror falling on him. What schoolmate—friend—relation—whose well-known form would he see dart across that space, and fall, never to rise again?

While his mind was yet tense with the horror of the

thought, across the space where his eyes mechanically rested a soft bulk, propelled by many hands, shot swiftly past the open doorway and wedged itself into the nook of the stairs. There was an odor of sulphur, of tar, a suffocating stench of burning feathers in the air.

Thrusting Hugh aside as though he had been a child, Falls tugged at the barricade he had erected across the doorway, tearing at the unyielding iron with frantic hands. It had taken the combined strength of himself and Watson to place it there inch by inch, but under Falls's mighty straining it slowly, sullenly gave place, and he sprang through the narrow aperture with a bound to the bundle smoking upon the entry floor. He trampled it, kicking the burning parts aside, himself almost invisible in the suffocating clouds of smoke which filled the space.

"Do you see that red tile, Hugh?" he panted, struggling for breath, his lungs bursting with the foul gases which he had breathed. "There in the entry floor — Yes? Well, whoever lights that bed again will have to pass it. When he does — "

"Yes," said Watson steadily.

"Can you shoot, Billy?" asked Hugh, over his shoulder.

"Naw, sur, Marst Hugh, — not to hit nuthen'."

"Then, Falls, I 'm the best shot, better let me — "

"'N-a-w!'" said Falls, in mockery of Hugh's slow, musical drawl, "'n-a-w — together, like we said."

The entry was dimly illuminated by the shifting light of the torches carried by the mob, the pine lights flaring bloody-red one moment and sooty-black the next. Under the wavering light the men inside could see the entry

stairs, the black bulk huddled at the bottom, and the red tile gleaming like a sinister pool of blood.

A cheer outside, the sound of a bounding step upon the tiles; a lithe form shot within the open doorway from the street, a blazing brand held high above his head, throwing the man's face into deep shadow; a long coat covered him almost to his feet.

As his foot touched the threshold of the inner doorway, he stooped toward the bundle and thrust his torch into it. As he did so, two shots rang out upon the air. The man's form shot upward to his full height, wavered, whirled half-round, and fell its full length across the red tile, which seemed to slip away beneath him in a slow stream of blood.

A second passed; another slipped by, and another. The man lay still where he had fallen, the lighted pine torch sputtering upon the tiles extinguished in his blood. Within the dark warehouse the three men stood motionless, waiting in an intensity of silence, listening for a sign, a sound to guide them. There was none.

In the entry outside, the lurid light ebbed slowly, replaced by the steady glare of the arc-light beyond. They could see the motionless figure of the man lying with his cheek upon the cold tiles, as a boy might lie down to sleep after an hour of play. His long coat, dashed aside in his fall, showed that he was in evening dress — a jewel sparkled upon his outflung hand.

"Who can he be?" thought Falls, and started forward. Watson restrained him, and together they stood listening intently.

Neither light nor sound now came from without. Was the mob still there? Incredible to think it could be

gone — dispersed as noisome vapor escapes into the open air.

Their ears, bursting in the silence, caught at last the hushed lisp of cautious footsteps upon the flags, the rustle of garments brushing the walls without — a cough, smothered hastily — a door closed far down the street. Slowly the consciousness grew upon them of emptiness without, even as they had been conscious of the presence of the mob in its silence.

Gone — slipped away, leaving the dead man alone upon the tiles. The second sacrifice offered up upon the altar of lawlessness. A life for a life — a soul for a soul.

"I told you they were the punk of the world!" cried Falls.

"Dey dun gorn, Marst Hugh — "

But Hugh was stooping over the dead man and made no reply. Falls bent beside him, raised the boy's limp hand, touched a damp curl upon his brow, bent closer, looked again.

How strangely familiar the young face seemed! Those straight, chiseled features fast settling into the calm immobility of death — where had he seen them?

"Who is he, Watson?"

"Lynn Archer — Betty's only brother," Hugh answered stonily.

XIX

HE OR I — CHOOSE!

WATSON rose at last from where he knelt beside Lynn Archer, turned and called:

“ Will-Henry ! ”

“ He ’s gone, Hugh,” said Falls. “ I gave him money, told him what to do. He can flag the east-bound train from that embankment out of town. He has a line to Blakeley in New York. Jim will get him off to the Bahamas — I have a friend there — ”

“ No use in that,” said Watson wearily. “ He ’s as safe in Adairville to-day as if he were in his mother’s arms. The reaction has set in ; he might walk the town all day and not a dog sniff at him ! ”

Falls laid his arm about Watson’s neck, speaking low at his ear :

“ What is to do about this lad lying dead there on the tiles ? No need to tell me what this means to you, Hugh, for I know only too well. Will you listen to me ? ”

“ No,” in the same lifeless tone, — the tone of a man whose brain alone is living. “ No ; I knew you would try to say it, Falls, — but there is no use in listening. I know.”

Falls’s voice sunk lower. “ No human being knows of your presence here to-night, Watson, or that you had any

part in this, except that negro; and I have sent him off. He will never return to Alabama."

"I knew the moment you spoke why you had sent him off, Falls—so that I need not show myself in this—to let you bear the brunt of it. But there is no legal aspect to this thing," he continued in the same dull tone. "We were upholding the law—this poor lad in open violation to it!"

"I was not thinking so much of the legal aspect; it is the personal consideration that weighs. Miss Archer's brother—Ben Archer's son! Forgive me, Hugh, but have you thought of this in all its aspects—how the family may see it?"

"Aye; in that second when I raised Lynn's head, I saw it all!" He threw himself wearily upon the stairs, and Falls stood beside him.

"Now see," he urged, "how simple this is. No faintest shadow of intentional wrong to bring remorse in its train. Why should you suffer? I implore you to be guided by me; let me think for you, act for you in this, Challie. Go back now, up-stairs; I stop here until the coroner comes; only one ball struck Archer. I have only to state that the negro and I fired together—"

"This is not so simple as you think; the negro did not fire. His pistol lies there, loaded still. True, but one ball struck him; but can you swear that it was your ball?"

"I—I could not swear," said Falls unsteadily; "but I shall not be asked to do so."

"Do you think I should find any comfort in having sacrificed you, Falls? No; this is between us, we will bear it together; share the mercy of the doubt between

us, in private, and face the world together. I could not sacrifice you, Falls, not even for — ”

He rose wearily. “ I must go — I must be the first one to see her — to tell her ! ”

“ Yes,” said Falls. “ I will stop here.”

The winter dawn stark in the grip of a bitter frost was showing its face, ghostlike, at the window-panes, when Ben Archer wakened to the consciousness of a careful hand upon the door underneath his window tapping insistently, waiting between each tap to listen for the answering movement within the silent house.

“ Who is it? What ’s wanted? Lynn — Sonnie — is it you ? ”

General Evert cleared his throat softly, and Archer started, a thrill of sharp horror gripping him.

“ Bennie,” said Evert gently, “ it ’s me; come down — ”

Archer was already huddling on his clothes; Betty met him in the upper hall, shivering with terror, clinging to him with sobs.

“ Oh, father, father! — Lynn — he is not in his room ! ”

Evert came inside, took the candle from the other man’s shaking hand, laid his own hand upon the other’s shoulder — not in tenderness, as Archer, even in this tense moment, knew. It was to steady him under the blow which fell with merciful abruptness. Evert had broken too many hearts to bungle. His method was good: one short, sharp blow straight at the heart’s core, that brought the life-blood in its wake. Experience had taught him that they healed best broken thus.

“ Bennie,” he said now, without preface, “ Falls has shot your son — dead ! ”

Well that restraining hand! Old Archer staggered under the blow.

"Falls?" he gasped, mechanically drawing his weeping daughter within his arms, "Falls!"

Evert briefly recounted the circumstances, without mention of Watson, adding in conclusion that there was no redress under the law; Falls had been upholding the law — Lynn, with calm directness, violating it.

After the first burst of Betty's grief had worn itself out to calmness, Archer returned to Evert, and the two old men, friends of a lifetime, sat beside the cold hearth for hours in low-voiced talk.

"Watson is in the house now," said Evert, as he rose to go. "I saw him go to the sitting-room some time ago. The less she sees of him the better — for awhile. The wedding must be postponed, of course, on account of Lynn's death; that will wean her by degrees — What? Oh, yes, if Hugh consents to give up this man Falls — to cast him off! Lynn's murderer — how can he do otherwise? . . . Betty's heart? Umph! Let me know if I can do anything — else, Bennie."

Watson had entered the house without knocking, and passed at once to the family room at the back of the house, where he hoped to find Betty or some one to send her a message.

She was there — alone, walking softly back and forth, sobbing to herself, moaning forth Lynn's name as though the boy stood beside her and could answer to that piteous appeal.

It tore Hugh's heart to hear her. He had not often seen Betty weep. She had her father's cold poise, and rarely, since her childhood, had Watson seen those bright eyes

dimmed, had need to comfort her. He went to her now, gathering her close into his arms, holding her silently, his cheek on hers, murmuring words of tenderness, of pity, gathering her hands against his lips, kissing the tumbled masses of her soft dark hair.

“Oh, Hugh,” she sobbed, “my poor, poor boy! He was mine — my own! I raised him, tended him — loved him! So young, so gay — so happy! And now — shot down in cold blood — murdered!”

Her voice rose hysterically into a passionate wailing appeal to him. “What had he ever done to Mr. Falls? Why should he vent his spite against Adairville by shooting Lynn? — the gayest, happiest boy! Nothing in the world but a boy!”

“Betty,” said Watson at last, and paused, pressed her closer to his breast. Constrained by his tone, the girl raised her face, and Hugh stooped and put his lips to hers, kissing her softly, almost solemnly, before he spoke again.

“Betty, Falls did not kill Lynn — ”

She started, gazing at him with amazed eyes.

“Falls is no more guilty of your brother’s murder — if you will call it such — than I. We fired together. No human tongue can tell, not Lynn himself if he stood beside us, whose ball killed him. That will never be known until all things are made known in the end.”

“Oh, Challie! don’t try to take the blame, to shield him! Who on earth would believe it?”

Watson drew her to the old-fashioned sofa near the fire. He told her with tenderest patience every detail of the scene, sparing himself not at all. Told of his offer to shoot alone, impressed her with the fact that he was

himself an unerring shot, Falls but an indifferent marksman; gently leading her, with all the art he had ever used to lead a jury, to take his view of the matter; tried to make her see the merciful probability of doubt, wherefrom both he and Falls drew comfort.

She grew calmer as he talked, lay more lightly in his arms, finally withdrew herself entirely from him and sat looking steadfastly in the coals, her eyes dark with tears.

"This is noble in you, Hugh," she said at last. "I love you for it! But do not hope to deceive us. It is perfectly plain to me. Mr. Falls has avenged himself upon Adairville—which hates him—and upon us all by murdering Lynn. He knew the law could not touch him. There were hundreds of men at home in bed—why did *he* have to play the hero?

"Of course," she added in a tone of quiet assurance, "of course after this you will give Mr. Falls up, Hugh?"

Watson moved restlessly.

"Let me tell you, Betty, the first thing Falls said—"

"No," said she with quiet decision, as she drew her hand from Hugh's grasp. "No, Hugh; I do not wish to wound your feelings about your friend,—if you can call Lynn's murderer your friend,—but I never wish to hear his name again. To me, to father, to our friends, he is the murderer of my brother—my only brother! None the less his murderer because the law cannot touch him, and he must go free—free to live, when my poor boy—Think of it," she cried passionately, beating her soft hands together in impotent grief, "think of Lynn! So happy, so young—Oh, Challie, it is hard that I must lose you both!"

Watson flung himself upon the floor at the girl's feet,

drew her hands from her wet eyes, forced her to meet his eyes with her own, which rained bitter tears, unheeded, down her cheeks.

“What do you mean, Betty, by such madness?” he said roughly. “Lose me? Child, I am almost your husband! You cannot lose me, Betty, save as a wife would lose her husband, by my death — or yours!”

“We cannot be married, Hugh,” she said firmly; “it — it would not be right! Lynn would cry from his grave — ”

“Not just now, darling; not as we had planned, perhaps; but after — a proper time for mourning — ”

“I shall mourn Lynn all my life,” she said with pathetic grief.

“Betty!” cried Watson desperately. “My darling, do not try to talk this over at all to-night. When you are calmer — ”

“I cannot see you again, Hugh, until this is settled.” She spoke with a well-considered decision that sunk into Hugh’s soul like lead.

“Would you — ” he was beginning passionately, but she took him coolly up.

“You leave me no choice, do you, Hugh? It rests with you — do not reproach me. You are free to choose between the woman whom you say you love — ”

“Say I love? God!”

“— and the man who has murdered her only brother!”

Watson walked a pace away, and stood looking down into the coals. “Must this — decision be made to-night, Betty?” He spoke gently.

“It is all with you, Hugh,” she said coldly. “Until you have made it public that you turn your back upon

this man, it would not be right for you to come here. Father—”

Watson stood still in tense deliberation, his blind eyes on the grate.

The room was lighted now by the pallid light of the new-born day; it showed Watson's face as pallid as the dawn, in a silent passion of renunciation.

“Listen, dear, I am going to accept your conditions. I will not see you until I am ready to cast Falls adrift — that was it? Answer, Betty! Yes? But — listen again, stop sobbing, dear. For six months I have been thinking of you as my wife — of myself as your husband; it is too late to change — even if I could. And I cannot. I accept the conditions you impose, since I must, but I hold you mine. No other man —” He raised her to her feet, crushing her against his breast, kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips, which turned stubbornly aside from his; bent and whispered one short word low at her ear, and left her.

Falls put aside his own urgent affairs, postponing his engagements in New York by wire, and lingered day after day at Watson's side. He had no comfort to offer him; Watson had tacitly refused it on that first day, but Falls refused to be rebuffed by his friend's stubborn reserve, although it both wounded and puzzled him — it was so unlike Hugh. He clung to his side with dogged tenacity. Days passed with hardly a word between them, and if Hugh drew silent comfort from Falls's strong, warm presence always at his side, he gave no sign.

At his offices, where he plunged with stern resolution into his work, Falls lounged at his side, smoking and read-

ing. He moved into two of Hugh's suite of rooms, changed his late, irregular hours to suit Hugh's more regular life; made Watson buy a horse, and took him for long rides about the country-side; joined Watson in a week's hunting in the Pine Barrens, where they camped in a lonely log-cabin, with the sound of the airy breakers of the pines beating forever upon the shores of silence in their ears, and hunted all day in the glorious, keen air, with the frozen stubble under their feet and the sunshine like wine in their veins. Watson was a keen sportsman; and the homely life, the breaking fatigue of tramping all day over the stubble, won him by imperceptible degrees back to himself.

"This is quite respectable weather — for an Alabama winter," he said smiling, as he kicked the ice upon a small pond and found that it would hold. "Here's some ice, Hugh — not in a mint julep — real ice!"

Little by little, in the eternal silences of the pines, Falls slipped off the reserve he wore, like a suit of chain mail under his ordinary manner, and told Watson of his early life; of the years he had spent in Central America — the money he had made there; of his strenuous life since he had been connected with the English syndicate; of the enterprises he had set afloat for them in the ends of the world. It was a terse, picturesque sketch of a life full of color, movement, of strong, virile ambitions, of big achievements; a clean, sane record, temperate and calm; untouched by passion, though full of a strong man's keen enjoyment of the pleasures of the world — the joy of living.

They were lounging, tired with the day's work, before a great pile of logs in the cabin chimney, while Falls told,

with thoughtful eyes upon the glow, of some incident connected with those earlier days.

"It's odd, Falls," said Watson, "how little women enter into all this part of your life. Most men living as you have lived — Your type of man, too! How does it happen —"

"I never seemed to care for those irregular entanglements that men drift into," Falls said carelessly. He rose, walking restlessly about the cabin, came to the hearth and stood kicking the logs about, staring into the glowing heart of the hickory with somber eyes.

"What is it, Falls?" asked Watson, without stirring.
"Don't get stamped like that. Say it, man —"

Falls stared down into the heart of the hickory logs.

"I've found Rosebud, Hugh," he said at last, quietly, and, as the other started up, a worried frown upon his brow, Falls crossed the space between them, and, drawing his chair beside Hugh's, spoke on with strong cheerfulness. "The evening before we came out here I rode out to Hillcrest to say good-by. Miss Adair had ridden out to the mountain house, and I rode on, hoping to overtake her; but — I managed to lose myself in some way, and after a bit of rough riding I stumbled upon that lonely cabin off the road, to the right, I think?"

"Yes; I know it —"

"Well, she was there — Watson, I've a plan I want you to listen to. Will you? Let me —"

He went on speaking, earnestly, convincingly, and though Watson had listened reluctantly at first, by degrees his knitted brow lost its harassed frown; he ceased to interpose objections, nodded acquiescence, and when Falls rose at last they separated for the night with a close hand-clasp, a word of thanks from Hugh.

XX

UNCLE CAD'S WIFE

ON the morning of the tenth of January, the date set for the sale of the old Adairville Gas Works, under the order of the court, Watson sat in his private office with his stenographer at his elbow, immersed in work. The door to the outer office opened gently; a clerk put in his head:

“Eleven-thirty, Mr. Watson.”

“All right, Anderson,” said Hugh abstractedly. “You have Western Union time?”

“Oh, yes, sir!”

“Hawkins,” to the stenographer, “step to the window in the hall and get the town time.”

“Twenty-nine to twelve,” the report came back. “They’re together to-day,—have been all day,” the man supplemented.

Watson plunged back into his dictation for twenty minutes longer without break or hitch. He rose then, and, taking his hat, passed into the street on his way to the court-house, where the sale had been called for twelve o’clock, noon.

It was but a step from Hugh’s office to the court-house; he had but to cross the street and traverse the tiny park surrounding the building, and he walked leisurely in that direction.

The proverbial January thaw had succeeded the clear cold of the preceding weeks, and a sky of deceitful fairness fawned overhead. Watson walked slowly, absorbed in a double train of thought which had possessed him all day, — the same perplexing tangle, so familiar, so inextricable! Falls and his affairs — the sale of this old gas company which he was on his way to bid in for Falls, and thereby break the back of the new company organized to fight him for the contracts — were uppermost; underneath, and held resolutely in check, was a flood of half-sad, wholly bitter reflections. To-day was to have been his wedding-day! He turned his head as he came in line with the street, half-way down which stood the house he had fitted up for Betty; it stood closed and empty amid its green lawns.

Hugh crushed back a quick sigh as he stepped upon the path leading through the Court-house Square; as he did so, the first calm stroke of twelve was announced by the clock overhead in the tower with silvery distinctness.

Watson snatched his watch from his pocket, consulting it with startled eyes, and with amazement too deep for exclamation. The walk from his office could not have consumed more than five minutes. When he came to himself he was mechanically counting the strokes as he strode, regardless of admonitory signs, straight across the green to the steps.

“Ten, eleven, — twelve!” fell with calm impressiveness upon his ear. Watson was no longer startled; a burning indignation had supplanted every other feeling in his breast.

With his watch still in his hand, taking the stairs at two bounds, he reached the upper landing just as a party of half a dozen gentlemen reached it from the flight above.

There was laughter, congratulations, a note of scarce restrained triumph in the voices which fell upon his ear.

Hallett and General Evert met him a second later.

"That you, Hugh?" asked General Evert, and Hugh calmly opined that it was. "You're just too late fur the sale. Thought we'd have to bid erginst Falls and his English millions. Heard he'd left you particular orders to 'double up any little local concerns'—"

"The doubling up will be in order later, General! Ah, Tony — step this way a minute. Good morning, gentlemen."

He drew Judge Cruikshanks aside.

"Were you present when this sale was made, Tony?"

"No," said Cruikshanks carelessly. "I'm merely passing through the building to my office. What's wrong with the sale?"

"I did not say anything was wrong. My watch was a little behind — or the clock a little ahead." He looked piercingly at him. "The sale was published for twelve o'clock, noon. Eleven fifty-five is not counted noon in the Tenth Judicial Circuit, is it?"

"The Tenth Circuit is n't run by your watch, Watson," said Tony, with judicial aspect.

"No?" said Watson coolly. "That's a good deal of a pity, too. It might be a trifle more honestly administered if it were."

The two men looked each other keenly in the eyes for a second; Hugh's gaze significant, Cruikshanks's blandly impervious to any meaning which the other sought to drive into that shrewd mind behind the gold-rimmed glasses.

"Got the new circuit licked into shape yet, Tony?" asked Hugh, as he turned to leave the building.

"About," the other answered, with a sudden tightening of his loosely hung, sensitive lips, the lips of a sybarite.

"That talk about the unconstitutionality of the Moody bill fizzled out, did n't it?"

"I can't say," said Tony, calmly non-committal. "You are better qualified to give an opinion upon that than any man I know. What do you think—"

"I have n't had time to look into it — yet. Pleasant weather — after the freeze."

Hugh's eyes were gleaming with laughter as he took his disconcerted way back to his office.

"D—— them!" he cried heartily. "D—— this whole rotten Tenth Circuit! 'Can't say,' indeed! He's holding his breath for fear some one will put up a test case. Well, my blooming judge, you are going to say shortly."

He sent Falls a note in his own beautiful, formal writing, so oddly uncharacteristic of the man and of the text of the note itself.

"Falls," he began with curt informality, "I'll pay for your ticket here and back if you will come down to Alabama and kick me from the river to the Gulf and back again. I've lost you the gas works. I let Hallett and Tony Cruikshanks beat me, I'll be hanged if I did n't! For the moment they are on top; but it is only for the moment, dear fellow! Don't worry—and don't cuss. Say that terrible oath of yours, that New England one — 'Jiminy' — and let it go at that. The thing was done by a dirty — an unspeakably dirty — piece of fraud, perfectly simple and perfectly effective — for the moment. Come on home — for Alabama *is* your home — you have only your clothes and your brains in New York; your heart's in Dixie. And a man's home is where his heart is, and latitude and longitude and mother tongue may go to the devil!"

"WATSON."

January slipped away, and when at last from the window of the car Falls's eyes fell upon the long, purple wall of the Cumberlands again, Spring stood a-tilttoe there and blew kisses from her warm mouth, sweet with the odor of growing things, adown the valley of the Tennessee.

Falls leaned out of the window, and the buoyant air beat in his face, vital with the smell of the fresh-turned soil in the fields. How familiar had grown that long line of mountains against the sky! Behind that purple wall lay Dixie—and Joan!

A thousand heretofore unconsidered sights and sounds welcomed him. A deep thrill stirred within him. This long, green valley paved with the silver river—those misty, dim blue mountain walls—this wooing air—this was Dixie, and Dixie *was home!*

Watson was at the station, and even in that first hand-clasp Falls saw that he was thinner, his dark cheek blanched as from overwork or confinement.

"The screw is on somewhere too tight," he thought. "Is it work or Miss Archer?" A shadow drifted across his own sunny mood as he remembered.

"Your rooms are all ready," said Hugh as they alighted at the door. "Lacey almost had nervous prostration getting them ready."

Watson sat down upon the table uneasily. "I've been studying how to break it gently to you, Greg." Falls turned swiftly to him. "The fact is, I've got to leave you alone to-night. I'm stopping at the mountain house with Joan and Uncle John; and Uncle John is away to-night; Joan is alone—"

"Darn you!" said Falls caressingly. "I thought—"

"I know what you thought. I am going on to that now. I 'll give you the facts in short order."

"Just so I know how we stand —"

"We stand pat! Cruikshanks confirmed the receiver's report of that rotten sale; he would, of course; he had to. But he trembled in his socks while he did it. It 'll cost him his newly found dignity of judge. Why, Falls, the thing smelled to heaven! I excepted to Tony's confirmation of the sale, of course, through Littlesmith — he was the heaviest creditor — yes, you know him. It took me some time to get it through him — he could not see where Tony had jurisdiction. The court *sits conjointly as a chancery court*; it was all regular, that part. I appealed it on two clauses, fraudulent sale and the unconstitutionality of the Moody bill creating this new circuit. In reality no such thing as a Tenth Judicial Circuit exists in Alabama. Tony and his court are the stuff that dreams are made of."

Hugh laughed with keen enjoyment. "There 'll be darkness upon the face of the waters, and men's hearts failing them for fear, before they 're done with all this!"

"And the end?" asked Falls, rather lost.

"We 'll be exactly where we were before Hallett and the General got their deal through; and they 'll be out what they paid Tony. The Tenth Judicial Circuit will be *non est* — 'a portion and a parcel of the dreadful past!'"

"Most extraordinary state of things!" murmured Falls.

"A-w, naw," said Hugh calmly, "not at all. Logical result of given causes. The Legislature is full of young asses from the Pine Barrens and the hill counties — what d' you expect? The journals of the House and the Senate

show that the Moody bill passed the House ripping, and went on to the Senate; the Senate committee reported back with a substitute for the bill, and the Senate adopted the substitute—with two amendments tacked to the substitute—and sent it back. Then the young asses bucked! The thing went to a conference committee, which decided that the Senate should recede from the amendments. This report was adopted by the House, and it was all serene. But—and here's the tangle—by some incredible piece of stupidity the House failed to pass the substitute as passed by the Senate. Tableau! The bottom drops out of the Tenth Judicial Circuit; Tony takes a seat 'way back in the bottomless circuit!"

"Leave Tony alone!" said Falls with a laugh. "Where do we come in? What's my cue?"

"The sale of the insolvent gas company will be set aside—if the Supreme Court quashes this Moody bill, and it will—and you can double up the Cumberland Gas Company's bids at your leisure. This time"—he was smiling back at Falls from the door—"this time I propose to bivouac upon the court-house steps for a few days previous to the new sale, so as to be in on time. Good night. Any message for Joan?"

"Get out!" Falls admonished him gently. "I'll do my own talking!"

Watson, at the mountain house, spent a lonely evening as it turned out. Milly Ann met him on his arrival, handed him a tiny note from Joan, pleading headache—could he dine alone? . . . Too bad not to see him. . . . Would be down later. . . .

"Tell her not to bother about me, Milly Ann. Yes, I'll dine now. Who was in that carriage I met going down?"

"Miss Jone's Uncle Cad's wife — "

"Mrs. Allen?" He pondered. "And Joan in tears. *Of course* she's crying!" He groaned in half-humorous, half-angry protest.

That afternoon Joan had flown lightly down to meet Mrs. Allen's carriage when it drew up at the gallery steps, joyously greeting the older woman.

"The very id-e-a of your coming all the way out here to see me! How p-e-rfectly delightful!"

"Yes," agreed the other, sighing and panting, her deep, indistinct guttural seeming to proceed from the nethermost fold of her series of chins; "yes, child; I had to come to see what you are doing 'way out here alone. It's not proper, Joan, for a girl like you — "

"Oh, Aunt M'Liza!" cried Joan, pathetically gay, "don't, pl-e-a-se don't chaperone me out here! There is n't a single thing in the w-i-de world out here in the woods but jay-birds — and ground squirrels."

"What do you do when young men come to call?"

"They don't come; and father is here, and Hugh. . . . Poor Hughie!"

"Yes, you mean about Betty? It's probably a blessing in disguise. I never could see what Hugh found in Betty. And now she's rejected him — "

"She has *not* rejected him!" cried Joan hotly.

"— because of his stubborn refusal to give up this man, Falls. Your Uncle Cad said to me last night, 'Liza,' said he, 'I've never known anything like Watson's defiant attitude about this man Falls.'" She dropped her subject, giving the odd effect of letting it slip away from her, groping for it, as it were, and grasping it again in another place.

"Your Uncle Cad saw this man Falls in New York — "

"Yes?" said Joan, with a rising inflection. "Did n't you say you wanted one of Phyllis's kittens, Auntie? There are four. The most ec-stat-ic creatures! with sapphire eyes, and rose-leaf ears, and tails too pointed for anything —"

"Don't talk to me about kittens, Joan! Your Uncle Cad sent me out here —" She paused, her heavy, kindly face perplexed. Her subject had eluded her again; she dived for it, coming to the surface a little out of breath.

"Did John ever tell you that I was your mother's best friend?"

"Yes," said Joan softly, "yes, he has, Auntie — lots of times!"

Joan was softly stroking her hand between her own.

That slippery subject which she could not hold was gone again. Presently she came up in a new place. "You 're nearly twenty, are you not, Jo?"

"I 'll be twenty in August, Auntie."

"You are old enough to know that there is sin in the world — and coarseness; that there is vile wickedness, and that men are not always just what they — er —"

A flood of scarlet poured over the girl's face.

"Father," she murmured piteously, "Father does not want me to know — to hear such things!"

The older woman took her hands firmly within her own, baring the tender face, the agonized eyes, to her loving, searching gaze.

"Men never want us to know, dear," she said; "but for all that we have to know. Your Uncle Cad saw this Mr. Falls in New York. He was in a carriage with Rosebud. She was tricked out to kill. He took her away from here with him."

As though a shot had pierced her heart, the girl sprang upward, wrenching her soft hands from the other's grasp, facing her, standing erect, with limbs which trembled almost too much to keep the slender figure at its proud poise; a tense line deepened between her brows, under which her eyes shone coldly gray, devoid of the tender color they wore at other times. Mrs. Allen started.

"I am too late — too late!" she murmured. "She loves him — this man!"

"Why do you tell this — this — horror to me?" said the girl at last, her level tones quivering under the strain she put upon herself. "Tell Uncle Cad to take his confidences to those who need them! . . . No! no! not if my own mother rose from her grave and stood before me would I listen! What more can there be?"

She half-turned away from the woman standing with agitated face beside her. "Your work is done, Auntie; you might as well go." She paused, as though she was not just certain of what she had said.

"I am a little busy to-day." She passed bravely to the door, opened it with unsteady fingers, and passed quietly to her own room, closing the door against the world.

Below, in the town, Falls was dropping to sleep, tired from his journey, a thought like a full-blown rose lingering at the half-closed door of his consciousness:

"To-morrow! I 'll see her to-morrow!"

XXI

THE MOOD OF WOMAN — WHO CAN TELL?

“**T**O-MORROW,” Falls had promised himself, and the next afternoon saw him in the saddle on the long ride out to the mountain house. From the brow of the hills behind Hillcrest the crumpled ranges lay before him, fold on fold, veiled in a curtain of rainy mist which was lifted here and there upon a lance of sunlight, so that its lacy edges just brushed the hilltops; though elsewhere it trailed heavily, sinking into the sinuses among the crumpled folds, where it lay like still lakes of burnished water.

“Seven weeks!” Falls tightened Joe’s rein, and his horse sped on. He had not seen Joan since the night of the Dixie Club ball, and he had carried with him through those busy weeks in New York the memory of her face as he had seen it in the last turns of the waltz.

Milly Ann met him at the gallery steps, sedately speculative. “Miss Jone ain’t here; she dun gorned er way,” she vouchsafed Falls, her face as void of expression as that of a black india-rubber doll; her voice seeming to be released by means of a string pulled somewhere in her economy, ceased abruptly when the cord flew back. She offered no enlightenment as to the vague location implied in “dun gorned er way.”

Falls interpreted it to mean that Joan was in town

shopping or visiting, and was getting out his card-case with blank disappointment, when a voice which he seemed dimly to remember hailed him from the back of the house, and Lethe's substantial presence, with "*Ad-lade*" upon her ample arm, bore down upon him in beaming welcome.

"Howdy, Mis'r Falls! Is yu' dun furgit Lethe—an' *Ad-lade*?" She set the unsteady little creature down upon the gallery floor. "G' long, nigger, and see Mis'r Falls! He de Yankee gemmem what rode yer."

Unmindful of Milly Ann's horrified eycs sternly regarding Lethe's "for'ardness," she pushed the little thing toward Falls, who touched her gently with his riding-crop, and, stooping, opened her tiny brown fist and put a coin into the little puckered palm, which instantly closed upon it. *Ad-lade*'s lips slowly widened, showing two rows of pearls and a tiny red tongue. Two great dimples, rising like bubbles upon the surface of a pond, appeared in her soft brown cheeks.

Lethe gave Milly Ann a defiant glance, openly flouting that demure damsel, blandly assuming herself the rôle of hostess.

"Is yu' dun comed to see Miss Jone? Case if yu' is—"

"I know," said Falls. "Milly Ann has just told me she is out." He handed to Milly Ann three cards as he spoke.

"Dey ain't no use in yu' leavin' no 'scriptions, les'n yu' jist er doin' hit fur style," said Lethe with kind officiousness. "Miss Jone ain't nowhere but down the cliff paf. She 's jist er setting dere er readin' in her book." With a last triumphant glance at the discomfited Milly Ann.

"Yu' Lethe!" whispered Milly Ann in a loud aside, "w'at *yu'* dun tole 'im de way down dere fur? Miss Jone's hidin' fum him!"

But Falls was already out of hearing. He struck into the path which wound along the cliff wall, and in twenty steps the house was lost to view, the stillness of the mountain solitudes about him. On one side lay the narrow, green cleft of Lost Cove three hundred feet below him, on the other a tangle of vines lashing together the under-growth of sumach and oak scrub, which hid Joan from him where she sat in a niche of the rocks. She wore a long box coat and a boyish red cap, from which her bright hair strayed about her face. An open book lay upon her lap, unheeded, while she read instead with dreaming eyes the pallid curtain of the mist drawn across the nearest ranges seeming to mark with a solid wall the end of the earth. A stone slipped under Falls's foot, and bounded off with a crash into the nether world of clouds and swaying tree-tops.

Joan started up, looking back along the path with startled eyes. Falls called to her, striding recklessly forward, sending a shower of stones down into the still depths.

"Wait! I'm coming down there!"

She rose and came a few steps along the path toward him, carrying a sleeping kitten upon her arm, followed by a yawning, shivering, sleek-coated fox-terrier, who, with cocked ears and twitching nostrils, considered Falls with grave suspicion as he advanced; decided that he was nearly up to the mark; sniffed his leggings with reserve; looked upward to his face archly, and, abandoning the last pretense of disapproval,—this was a man after a fox-

terrier's own heart, — leaped upon him with a shrill bark of welcome.

"Bob-White," remonstrated Joan, "don't be so — so demonstrative. How do you do, Mr. Falls?" She gave Falls her hand as she spoke — or did she give it? Only for one second did it touch his palm; before his eager grasp could close upon it, before he knew that he had touched it, it had slipped away from him.

"Shall we go up? . . . Certainly, I prefer it here, too. And it is quite mild; this is the loveliest month of our spring."

Joan's eyes as she talked rose no higher than Falls's breast; they rested level with the spot where his riding-coat was buttoned, though his eyes, warm and eager, sought hers. She wore about her the serene composure which he had scarce seen since he had met her first. Then it had seemed to him a graceful garment draping, but not concealing, a sweet frankness beneath. To-day she wore it as a suit of chain mail, delicate as silk, flexible as leather, impervious as armor.

Falls struggled silently to regain his poise under his strong recoil of surprise and pain. He sat beside Joan on the bench among the rocks, stroking mechanically, with an unconscious hand, the fox-terrier's head as it lay upon his knee; gazing sometimes on that sleek little head with loving, dozing eyes, sometimes upon the wall of mist. Was it really in front of him — or was it not a dull, blank curtain across his own brain, cutting off the past?

"Yes," Falls heard himself saying at last, with an evenness which amazed him, — "yes, New York is perfectly beastly in February and March. I 'm rapidly becoming

a sybarite about my weather. Dixie has spoiled me. To think of sitting out-of-doors in February!"

But even as he called attention to its mildness, he was conscious that it was cold here at the verge of the cliff, and turned with mechanical courtesy to the woman at his side.

"Is n't it too cold for you, Miss Adair? Let me—"

His tone had only the coolest of conventional solicitude; his careless glance swept over the girl with courteous indifference as he rose to draw about her the rug upon which she sat. He did not touch her, he did not even linger as he drew the folds about her, but Joan sat as though turned to stone, a look of cold repugnance growing upon her face. It seemed as if every fiber of her being, mind and soul, shrank from the lightest contact with him.

Already in Falls's soul the gates of pain had been shut down, locked, and barred; and though he read Joan's attitude with an amazement too deep for words, he did not betray his knowledge of it by the slightest sign. When he seated himself again he took possession of a flat rock in front of her.

His words came with an animated readiness that rather amazed Falls himself, and strung the girl to keener emulation. He had accepted the challenge of her changed manner with a steady courage, meeting her with a tact calmer, more perfect than her own. She was conscious of a sharp pang of resentment; a mad impulse to give voice to the agony which was bursting at her own heart. She had expected — she scarce knew what. Some little, little sign at least that he felt a kinship to her own anguish — that much she might have. But there had been none; only at the first moment, when her hand had slipped from

his, had she been conscious of the shock which had thrilled him; but now the stone upon which he sat was not more unmoved than he, as he waited a fitting moment to take his leave.

Bob-White, asleep upon the rug at Joan's side, missed Falls from his place; he stirred uneasily, yawned reproachfully at him, looked sheepishly at Joan, tenderly at Falls, licked Joan's hand in fawning apology, rose, slunk across to Falls, and leaped upon his knee.

As their eyes met in a smile, a rush of color swept over Joan's face. It was the first time that her eyes had met his fully; he had had only fleeting glimpses behind those perplexing lashes, and he started, striving to hold them with his own. Her lips smiled as she rose, cuddling the sleeping kitten against her breast.

"You need not apologize," she said to the dog; "you may follow Mr. Falls back to town if you like. Puckie and I will go in to the fire and go to sleep upon the rug, and Puckie will have chicken bones for supper; and you"—she stroked the sleek, small head making eager, deprecatory motions toward her, even while the little wriggling body pressed itself closer and closer to Falls's breast—"you will have the ashes out of Mr. Falls's pipe."

"Don't asperse my character," said Falls with a smile, as he rose to gather up the rugs and books scattered about, holding the little dog in his arm, "and don't grudge me my place in Bob's heart—if I have one there."

"I do not grudge you it," she told him with her gentle aloofness, which was not coldness, but the studious kindness which courtesy accords in the case of unconsidered acquaintances. "And to show you that I

do not, I will give Bobby to you, if you like, for your own."

"Really?" cried Falls, his face alight with pleasure.
"You are willing for me to have him?"

"If Bobby wants to go; if he likes you best."

Falls looked down at the little dog dozing against his bosom.

"We had better be sure he knows his own mind; I 'll set him down and let him choose between us."

Bob-White, suddenly roused from his warm dream of chicken bones and chops, stood in the path shivering piteously, looking from one to the other of these arbiters of his fate, with wrinkled brows and alert ears.

"Bobby, honey," said Joan, regarding the unhappy Bob-White torn with the pangs of indecision. His loyal dog's heart was with Joan — every higher ideal of his little soul, every conception of his mind set upon this man — this glorious creature in leggings, with a horse and a strong, firm, warm hand to stroke one; and at whose manly heels one could trot, the envied of all other fox-terriers.

"Bobby, honey, the issue of your life is before you.
'Look on this picture and on this'!"

"Now don't," said Falls, "don't bias his little mind like that. If this thing is to turn upon a point of looks, why, I 'll withdraw from the contest."

"What do you suppose he 's basing his decision upon, if not looks? If I thought he was such a mercenary little wretch as to be weighing his chances of chops — "

"They know," said Falls slowly. "God gave dogs and women an added sense which tells them whom to trust. Dogs" — he paused a moment — "dogs are wise enough

to obey it, and so find their happiness where God meant them to find it—" The sentence lapsed; he made no effort to take it up.

Bobby still stood in the path, forgotten by the arbiters of his fate, whose eyes had met at last in the glance which Falls had hungered for. He had it now. Reproach?—could it be reproach? But a happy thought had come to Bobby. Stupid not to have thought of it before! Compromise—have his cake and eat it, too! He ran to Falls and, grasping a strap of his legging, sought to draw him to Joan; then to Joan in mad haste, and tugged at her long coat, with backward, imploring gaze on Falls. And back again to him.

"No! no! Bob," said Falls, bending to stroke him, "this is not a compromise measure. I—I could not palter with love!" He spoke so low that the girl could scarce hear him. "It must be 'all in all or not at all'!"

He looked up after a moment, smiling. "This must be an assisted fate. Bob can't make up his mind. I have one advantage over you, Miss Adair."

"What is that, pray?"

"I can whistle."

"Why, so can I," indignantly.

"All right," coolly, "you may have the first go. Call him—whistle to him."

Joan drew her lovely mouth together in the shape of a kiss, looked a little blank, tried again, blushed, laughed.

"Why—er!"

"You've had your go." Falls gave a low whistle, and Bobby bounded to him, leaped upon him, clawing his way upward to his arms, and covered Falls's cheek with an ecstasy of kisses from a warm, red tongue.

"After that demonstration, I make you a title," murmured Joan.

Falls went inside with Joan to unburden himself of the rug and books he carried. The storm which had been brooding all day in the mountains had come rapidly at last, and the first heavy drops were falling upon the gallery floor as they crossed it.

"You must wait, Mr. Falls," said Joan courteously; "storms in the mountain this time of year are so dangerous." The dusk hid her eyes from him, but in her voice was the same gentle, cool abstraction, as colorless as the mist rolling in upon them. Falls set his teeth in a momentary sharp wrestle with himself.

"Thank you," he said, his tone as even as her own, "I have a business engagement at seven; I must get down."

At the same moment Judge Adair came forward from the hall to greet them; kissed his daughter, gave his hand to Falls.

"You will stop for the night, Mr. Falls," he said with courteous decision. "These spring storms in the hills are not to be tampered with — timber, you know — I insist. We could not have you leave us in this storm. Joan —" The storm, which had come on apace, had darkened the hall so rapidly that Judge Adair had not seen her slip away; but Falls had marked it; it gave more firmness to his demurrer.

"Listen!" said the old man, and held up his hand with a smile. The wild rush of the rain outside, like white horses trampling the lawn, the booming of the distant cannonade of the wind in the heavy timber, the sullen roll of thunder behind the peaks, offered an irrefutable argument against him. Falls acquiesced. Yet to the man's

sore pride, his anguish of doubt and longing, the enforced nearness to Joan under her roof, her father's hand upon his arm, was a trial scarcely to be borne. Falls thought with dismay of the quiet, lamplit evening before him; the homelike hearth, the tender intimacy, they three about the shining board; of the girl's averted eyes which never would meet his own, her ready tongue which made courteous effort to entertain him, her soft voice, solicitous for his comfort. . . .

"This is my Castle of Indolence," the old man was telling him, with a gentle laugh, when at last Falls dragged himself from his bitter musing. "I come here to escape the courts and the lawyers. Inside these doors folks rest, whether they like it or no. Up here, the hour before dinner is sacred to repose—napping, you know. Will you go to your room, or rest in the library here?" He drew Falls to the open doorway. Within was the cosy calm of the evening hour; curtains drawn, a gleaming hearth, the subdued light of reading-lamps which shed a clear glow downward, leaving the room in gloom.

"Here, I think," said Falls with a smile. "It would be a restless mind indeed which could not find repose here!"

But when Judge Adair had left him, he did not seek it. He paced the quiet room with restless feet, hearkening to the hoarse whoop of the wind in the gorge as to the voice of a comrade. He was not thinking, merely struggling among the breakers of feeling. He fought, as strong men fight, against his love as against a chain which galled him; holding down with resolute will the angry, baffled pain which swelled his sore heart to bursting, as he would have held down some savage creature

with whom he wrestled. Why did he suffer so? Fool! When all along he had known it must come to this. It had been madness, folly, to dream it could be otherwise. She was of the place, the people who hated him, whom he hated. At first—ah, at first—had she loved him, even then? . . . Could he blame her—did he? No. It had been too strong for her—that was all. What was a woman's frail purpose against God's meaning, working in her like a knife?

He flung himself into the dark corner of a couch and gave himself to the mingled sweetness and pain of the memory of the Dixie ball—to futile questioning. Again he felt Joan tremble in his arm, saw her sweet face blanched with pain—pain for him! Falls hugged the thought for a brief moment, then thrust it fiercely from him again.

Suddenly, and without a warning sound, a woman's form showed against the lighted hall beyond, as she peered into the dusky room.

"Jo!" said Betty's voice. "A-w, Joan! Why, where on earth *is* everybody? I've had *my* nap—"

She came into the room, and Falls rose from his dark corner to meet her.

"Miss Adair is resting, I think, Miss Archer." He spoke quietly, fearing to startle her, but his thoughtfulness was wasted. As though a trumpet had sounded in her ear, the girl started back; her eyes hardening with anger to gleaming sapphires, she gazed at Falls, a wordless question on her lips.

"You did not know that I was here? The storm has detained me." He turned the chair, upon which her hand rested, slightly toward her. "Won't you sit down?" he

said gently. "I have wanted so much to speak to you; there are so many things—"

"To me?" she said in a low, even voice. "Speak to me — *you* murderer!"

Falls looked down upon her in silence. Her delicate brows were drawn, her features rigid with anger; and her resemblance to that other face whose features he had watched grow slowly rigid in death smote him with a spasm of remorseful pity. He went a step nearer to her.

"Will you not let me speak — explain?"

"Would you dare to try?" she asked him slowly, a sort of angry wonder slowly breaking through the rigid mask of her face.

"Not for myself, perhaps," Falls told her, and made a half-weary gesture of negation, "but for Watson — yes, I *would* dare!"

She laughed, and even in that troubled moment Falls marveled that a sound so soft upon the ear could convey so harsh a meaning.

"Are not your heroics a little bit late in the day, Mr. Falls?" she said with withering scorn. "You have sacrificed Hugh without remorse —"

Falls faced her squarely, his head held high, an amazement in his somber eyes almost too deep for words.

"I — I sacrifice Hugh?" He paused a moment, steadied his voice. "I would give my life for Watson," he said with even deliberation, "and he knows it. For the rest —" He turned back to the fire, let the sentence lapse. Betty's blue eyes, hard and bright with anger, softened; her face relaxed its lines of hate; she sank into the chair. It was impossible to doubt the sincerity that spoke in Falls's half-weary voice, in his face, harsh

and bitter with suffering. His somber eyes under the deep fold in his brow were upon the red logs; he did not look at Betty,—his own bitter thoughts engrossed him.

“But you knew,” she began hesitatingly—in spite of her anger, her bitterness, a wistful note would betray itself in her voice; her own pain, her loneliness, her yearning for Hugh could not be suppressed—“you must know, Mr. Falls, that—that I—that Challie—” Her speech faltered, died upon her quivering lips. Falls turned quickly to her. He had not liked the girl—she had been so harsh, so implacable to him, it seemed impossible that she could be tender. But he put that by; when all was told, this was the woman whom Watson loved; nothing else really mattered.

“I *knew* nothing,” he said gently. “Watson has never spoken of you. But of course I suspected the estrangement. It was of this that I wished to speak, if you will let me?” He turned his back to the chimneypiece, faced her, looking into her eyes, his own eyes grave and insistent. “You know the circumstances of your brother’s death, do you not?”

Tears welled up in her eyes, her hand fluttered to her throat; she could not speak, but she nodded silently.

“Forgive me if I give you pain—I must speak for Hugh’s sake—for the sake of plain right and common justice.” He went on rapidly, to spare her all he could. “You know but one ball struck the lad. That ball was from my hand or Hugh’s—the negro did not shoot.” He leaned toward her insistently. “Believe that it was from my hand, Miss Archer. Believe that I killed your brother. Morally the blame is mine. I took Hugh there that night; but for me he would never have been there. You know

that Challie would not have harmed a hair of Lynn's head. You believe this?"

"Yes; oh, yes," miserably. "It—I—you do not understand, Mr. Falls—"

Falls did not heed her; his voice had sunk to its gravest note; he pressed her hard; he would not be diverted from his purpose.

"Do you know what this is to Watson — this estrangement between you?" He lifted his head, stared blindly past her into the dark room. "Do women ever know? . . . Of course, Hugh does not speak, but I know that this is breaking his heart." The girl, with a gesture of intolerable pain, hid her face in the cushions of the chair; but Falls would not be stayed. "What fairness is there in your attitude to him — what reason? Why should Hugh suffer for my fault? Blood-guiltiness cannot rest upon us both."

"It was not that!" she cried, raising her face toward him. "You — you do not understand. I — I thought somehow you knew; but I see now you do not."

She dashed the tears from her eyes, faced him, speaking with rapid clearness. "I broke my engagement with Hugh, not because I ever believed him guilty of Lynn's death — my mind simply cannot, cannot associate him with that awful thing! It was because of *you*, Mr. Falls, because he would not break with you! His friends, our kin — every one had tried to influence him and he would not listen — not even to me! Why," she passionately demanded, "why should Hugh take your side against his lifelong friends and — and *me*! Then when this dreadful — dreadful thing happened, when my poor boy —" She paused, steadied her quivering voice, crushed down

her sobs, and with bitter, resentful eyes upon Falls's unmoyed face, hurried on: "Then after Lynn was killed, and we all, all knew it was your fault, I told Hugh he must make his choice; you or me, and he took — you!"

"Not in the sense you mean," exclaimed Falls earnestly. "Is it possible that you do not see that no other course was open to him, in honor? Would you have had him suborn his honor to his client, betray his friend? What are you women made of! You fail, utterly fail, Miss Archer, to see this thing at its true value. Watson's love for you should never have been weighed against his loyalty to me, never for a moment! It was unfair to him — cruel! There could be no question of my influence with Hugh as opposed to your own, unless you or others chose to force that issue. It is incredible to me that you should, but you seem to have ignored the vital issue; it was not the sacrifice of his friendship for me, alone, that was involved in the demand you made upon him, but this, of course, you did not know. What it really meant was the sacrifice of his business integrity, his personal honor; that he should himself become the tool of unscrupulous political tricksters in a deal whose object was to line their own pockets! You are not lacking in shrewdness, Miss Archer. Ask yourself why pressure, and persistent pressure, should have been put upon Hugh for this purpose! This ring I mentioned, with Evert as its leader, had already tried to effect this thing in other ways, to lash Hugh in —"

The girl started upright in her seat.

"Lash Challie!" she exclaimed hotly. "How — how dare they!"

"Aye," said Falls grimly, "lash Challie! But they

failed — How? It would not interest you to know; a business detail, that is all; let it go at that, won't you? The only part of all this worth your consideration is this: when they had failed to effect their purpose they played their last card." Falls paused, but his stern glance drove his meaning home; in spite of herself the girl wavered; facts unknown to Falls pressed upon her, and without her own volition fitted themselves into place in his quiet recital. But Falls was speaking again, and his quiet voice carried conviction spite of her stubborn hatred of the man himself.

"This last card I speak of was, briefly, you, Miss Archer! If you could be got to make this demand upon Watson, ah, then indeed, they counted on success."

The girl was half-convinced; but her hate for Falls was like a cordial, the pain of his words stung her to a quick reprisal.

"All this does credit to your — invention, Mr. Falls," she said smoothly; "it is, I suppose, a natural revenge, and quite worthy of you, to slander the men who have injured you — "

"You are deliberately missing the point, Miss Archer. No one has injured me, though, of course, the motive of the attack upon Hugh was to injure me; still, in effect I have escaped. It is Hugh who is suffering. That is my only concern with this matter; that is to me the inner imperative! That is why I have, as you say, 'dared.' Your antagonism, your childish pique — wounded vanity, do not affect me to any degree; but," he finished, with his old grave simplicity, "it is breaking Challie's heart."

Betty turned a face from which every tint of its usual

lovely bloom had faded, upon Falls, her bosom rising and falling in a tumult of pain and anger.

"How—how dare you!" she breathed with quivering lips. "Why do you thrust yourself into this? What concern of yours is it?"

"It is not entirely between you and Hugh," said Falls gently, "and I told you a moment ago why I have spoken—well, thrust myself in, if you prefer the term! Watson will never give way in this—No! Do not deceive yourself, Miss Archer! You can break his heart, rob life of all that it is worth to him, but you cannot make Hugh betray his honor. Child," he cried with a sudden vehemence, "is happiness so cheap that you can afford to be thus reckless with it?"

Betty did not answer, but gazed steadily past him into the blaze. Falls dropped into a chair beside her, and though her hard gaze did not leave the fire, he knew she listened as he talked on; no longer arguing, but telling her, gravely and simply, little homely details of Hugh's daily life; assuming, with quiet tact, both her interest and her right to know all of his inner life that Falls knew himself; and by imperceptible degrees this tacit assumption of her possession wooed her, as Falls knew it must, to forget the jealousy of him that had rankled so sorely. Without a hint of effect, yet without reserve, he described the change in Hugh; the weary boredom which had replaced his old, gay humor; his restless days and sleepless nights; his manly effort to hide his need of Betty, his loneliness; the agony of yearning which would not let him even call her name lest he give way—all this he told her, and as she listened her stubborn face grew tender; a sigh quivered through her shut lips; she forgot the man

beside her, her long lashes drooped over dreaming eyes—eyes that dreamed, as Falls well knew, of Hugh. She did not notice when his voice finally ceased, and they sat together in silence for a space, broken only by the clear tinkle of the embers on the hearth, and the bellow of the storm which still lashed the forests without. Falls watched her curiously for some sign of yielding that would tell him he had won the battle for his friend.

She rose at last and turned to Falls. “I do not pretend that our talk here to-night has changed my feelings, my personal feelings, to you, Mr. Falls,”—Falls bowed a little wearily,—“but I am glad you have told me this. So glad!” A flush sprang to her cheeks. She hesitated, went a step nearer him a little shyly. “I—I know you did it for Challie’s sake—brought us together again, I mean; I know you think I am not good enough for him —”

“I know you are not,” he told her inexorably.

“But if it is any satisfaction to you to know that—that —”

“You ’ll do the right thing by Hugh?” he cried eagerly. “You mean that? I may tell him?”

In the eager glow of his pleasure for his friend, Falls held out his hand, but Betty shrank coldly back.

“Why do you hate me, child?” he asked slowly, as he dropped his hand. “What makes you hate a man who never injured you?”

“I — every one does,” she said simply. “All the people that I go with hate you. I only went with the rest.”

XXII

HEARTS INSURGENT

“THIS is Betty’s bridal bouquet, father,” cried Joan, holding up for his inspection a loose, exquisite bunch of freshly gathered snowdrops. “Hugh dug the bed for Betty and me when we were tots. I think it is a rather sweet idea, don’t you, father?”

“Yes. It is hard for me to realize that Challie is to be married to-day, and to little Betty Archer. Why, ’t is only yesterday I was shaking hands with Ben Archer and asking after his new baby girl.”

“It is going to be a p-e-rfectly i-d-e-a-l wedding,” sighed Joan, in rapt complacency. “I planned it e-v-ery bit myself. And the house — ”

“Falls is Hugh’s best man, is n’t he?”

“Oh, father,” in tender, shocked surprise, “a best man at a wedding like this — Who ever — Mr. Falls is in New York; he will not be at the wedding.” Her eyes were on the dainty bells; a hard note marred her fresh young voice; a hot flush swept her cheek; she choked back the pain which rose in her throat as a vision of Falls’s face floated for a moment before her.

And the quiet wedding had been over two weeks before Falls found himself again in Alabama. He sat in his office at the power-house, his foreman McNelly with him, his bag and coat upon a chair beside him. The west-bound

train had set him down an hour before at the bridge, and he had walked across to get his mail, which lay upon the desk before him. Both gloom and weariness were in the fixed gaze he bent upon the smoke curling from his cigar.

"I might put Carmichael here, since we are so pressed for men; he is pretty fair with machinery. The up-town place is easier to fill."

"Aye, sir," said McNelly with reserve, "you might."

"Things are running a trifle roughly just now, McNelly, but we 'll come out ahead yet. We 've a good fighting chance. And the contracts *must* be held!"

"All right, sir," said McNelly cheerfully, "ef you say so, Mr. Falls." And Falls, with one of his rare moments of softening, laid his hand upon the man's rough shoulder; but even as he did so a quick frown crossed his face. He glanced with keen exasperation at the man's face.

"You 've been drinking," he said coldly.

"Only a finger as I came by town, sir — nothing to hurt. You have worse than me to look to, Mr. Falls," significantly.

"Nothing is worse than a drunken foreman, McNelly."

"I 'm not drunk, sir."

"Drinking — let it go at that. I will go back East on that late train. Get my bag across to the station in time, will you? I must get in to my rooms for an hour or two."

But if he was getting in to his rooms, he was taking an uncommonly roundabout way, or the Leftwich Building must be coming to meet him at a trysting-place among the hills, for he turned aside, and took Joe rapidly along the mountain road which led up the broad steps of the

foot-hills. About him, as far as eye could reach, was the crude brilliancy of March's varnished landscapes and lacquered skies.

With the reins upon the horse's neck, his unseeing gaze upon the panorama of spring bloom outspread before him, he mused in bitter introspection.

"I have the drift of this, I think," he said to himself. "It is some infernal rot about their insane prejudice — their blasted 'color-line!' I might — nay, I could, convince Joan's mind; but how combat instinct, rearing, and prenatal influences? She would bow to me as Betty does," — he laughed shortly, — "and look behind her to see who saw her do it. . . . No, it must be all in all — or not at all. I will not crawl to any woman. I would not have her love unless her faith — " Joe nickered restlessly, and Falls, peering into the woods in the direction of the horse's pointing ears, saw deep within the tangled greenness where the ragged snow of dogwood powdered the half-bare undergrowth, the glint of a burnished flank. A spirited head was thrust through the boughs, and Ritchie came slowly to meet them, his saddle empty.

Falls leaped to the ground, crashed through the flowery thickets, trampling the waxen faces of the mountain laurel, and a moment later the dragging rein was in his hand, and Ritchie, nothing loath, was nozzleing his sleeve in condescending recognition. Falls glanced him over hurriedly; then suddenly he leaned sick and trembling against the horse. Upon the creamy leather of the saddle was a red stain, yet damp to his touch. A moment to beat back the sharp anguish which blinded him, and Falls had plunged back into the thicket, following the fresh tracks in the loamy soil.

Deep within the hushed beauty of the spring woods, where the sunlight sifted through half-opened foliage upon a carpet thick-set with violets, Joan wandered, singing softly to herself, the heavy folds of her habit slung across one arm, her eyes searching out the haunts of the wild flowers, which slunk out of sight in cracks and crannies, and fled to the topmost points of the boulders to escape this charming marauder. At every other step she paused to add yet one more to the great, straggling, lovely bunch she held. She was standing, poised lightly upon a stone, pursuing a clump of Indian pink, when a crash in the woods behind her first caught her ear. She abandoned her floral prey for the moment, and stood listening, like a lovely dryad about to slip into the mossy beech-hole at her side. Not frightened — what was in the woods to frighten anybody? — but listening with misgiving for the thudding of the iron hoofs she expected to hear. Ritchie — the cunning thing! And she had knotted that bridle — and knotted it!

An impetuous hand thrust aside the wild azaleas, and Falls stepped into the sunlit glade, glancing keenly along the ground for something — the girl could not think what. Herself unseen, Joan stood transfixed, her eyes on Falls, her hand holding the flowers pressed against her breast. A sudden mist dimmed her vision, so that, for a moment, she could not see him. And it had been so long — so long, since she had seen him! She had thought he was in the North. How came he here — what could he be looking for — with that pale face of anguish?

The torturing vision which Mrs. Allen's words had seared upon the girl's brain for the moment slunk out of sight. Deep within her young bosom woke and stirred

the primal instinct. He was there before her, and, for some reason which she could not divine, he was suffering; she loved him—and he needed her.

She slipped softly from her perch, and, stumbling in the heavy folds of her habit, with wide eyes which never left Falls's face, she went toward him.

"What is it?" she cried. "What troubles you?" Unconsciously she held her hands out to him, the great bunch of flowers dropping unheeded upon the ground.

Falls could not speak; with her hands in his, crushing them against his breast, he gazed dumbly down upon her in the swift revulsion from despair to relief, to certainty.

They stood thus, motionless, in the first shock of feeling. Each was drinking deep of the unexpected joy of the other's presence.

It was Falls who spoke first. "The horse!" he said unsteadily, "Ritchie! I met him in the road—his bridle loose—blood on the saddle! I thought—God!" His broad chest heaved convulsively.

Joan had drawn her hands away from him, and with a little trembling smile she held up her wrist, about which a handkerchief was tightly twisted. The folds of the linen were stiff with blood.

"I tried to reach that Judas bloom—such a fine bit—from the saddle, and Ritchie started and jerked my arm against the barbed wire of the fence."

In spite of her sudden cool aloofness—for Joan was beginning to remember again—Falls took her arm into his hand, and deftly unwinding the handkerchief, laid bare the jagged cut upon her wrist. "It is nothing," he said, with a quick sigh of relief, after a moment's examination; "it has stopped bleeding."

The little blue-veined wrist lay along his palm; too proud to struggle, the girl left it quietly in his hold. It may be that those minutes of agonized uncertainty in the wood had shaken the man out of his habitual self-control. Whatever the cause which prompted the mad impulse, Falls bent his head quickly and kissed the wound; kissed it with all the pent-up passion with which for weeks he had been struggling.

With his kiss, memory awoke, and with a gesture of loathing, she snatched her hand from his lips. A flood of angry scarlet poured over her face and ebbed again; her eyes met Falls's with the same frozen horror and disgust which he had seen before.

"How — how dare you!" she whispered. She turned from him with hidden face, and, as if her trembling limbs could no longer support her, sank upon a stone and buried her face upon her outstretched arms.

Falls stood still, his face slowly whitening, his mind striving to pierce the motive underlying the girl's swift aversion. Suddenly he crossed the space between them, dropped upon his knee beside Joan, and drew her hands from her tear-stained face. She struggled to rise, to free her hands, but he held her with gentle firmness.

"We are going to have this out to-day, you and I," he said with exquisite gentleness, his head bent down to her averted face. "I had thought that I would go away, get this thing under, blot you out of my life — as men do, you know; but God — fate — whatever it is, has given me this chance. I would be mad to let it pass me by."

Falls spoke brokenly, with a stammering tongue. "I love you, Joan — love you. . . . You know, do you not?

For months — since the very first almost — you have been all — all — ”

Joan writhed in his hold, shrunk from him — tried to thrust him off. “Don’t — don’t speak like that to me,” she sobbed; “I cannot, cannot bear it!”

His voice sunk lower. “Tell me what this is that has come between us? Has n’t it — does n’t it — Joan, is it the curse of Dixie that poisons the blood of all you Southern people, — this cursed color-line?”

She did not answer.

“You will tell me, will you not?”

She met his eyes at last, her own hard with pain. “I asked father; father says no sane person would doubt the evidence of his own senses. And I am sane.”

Falls’s stern lips bent into a smile of tender coaxing. “Is it the piccaninny I rode on my shoulder?” he asked.

“No,” she said, looking straight past him down the green alleys of the woods; “no, I saw you — ”

“Saw me? In God’s name where? — doing what?”

He saw her struggle to answer, saw the words die on her lips, and, like fire smitten from a stone by the sharp impact of a blow, his own mind flashed him the answer. He rose from where he knelt and looked her coldly over as though he saw her for the first time.

“Great God!” he said at last slowly, “do you think me so vile?” He laughed a hoarse, shaken laugh, not good to hear. “No wonder you fended off my touch! Child, what sort of men . . . Did you think that I could come to you — ” The girl made an anguished gesture. “I know,” he said, “I know I forced this on you — you tried to avert it — but I had to know. Well” — he drew his breath in sharply through clenched teeth — “well, we

are both awake now; wide-awake. But one thing before I go. You did not state the proposition fairly to your father. You should have told him the evidence of one of your senses, unsupported; merely that of eyesight. You saw me at that cabin over there. Yes; but Joan, you did not know what I did there — why I went! When you do — if ever you do — it may change things for you. As for me — ” He picked up his hat, paused a moment. “ Ritchie is just below us, here upon the road. May I — ”

She made a negative gesture without raising her head, and a moment later his step sounded upon the rocks of the roadway, growing fainter; an echo of his voice floated to her as he spoke to his horse.

“ Joan is coming, pet,” said Watson, coming in with a telegram in his hand to where Betty lay, like a drooping rose, among her pillows, convalescing from malarial fever. “ St. Augustine won’t seem so far from home then, will it? Won’t it be great to have her? ”

“ Yes,” said Betty without enthusiasm. “ Mark Caldwell is coming, too,” she added with apparent irrelevance. It brought Watson’s heavy brows together in an annoyed frown.

“ A-w, there ’s nothing in that,” he said shortly.

“ I would n’t be a man for anything,” said Betty with calm scorn, “ much less a lawyer! They *are* the most obtuse — It takes a hundred pages of typewritten evidence and twelve stupid men in a box, and a judge, and heavens knows what else, to get a single thing into their heads! ”

Watson smothered a laugh upon her bosom as he leaned over her. “ May I inquire, madam, concerning your procedure? ”

"Why, I just *know*, and that's all there is to it. And I just know that Joan will never look at Gregory Falls—"

"If she does not," said Hugh, his worried frown deepening, "she will make the mistake of her life! Falls is the finest gentleman I have ever known, Betty! 'The truest friend and the noblest foe!'"

"Pooh, Challie, you are so absurd about Mr. Falls!"

Watson was silent; Betty slid a penitent hand into his; drew his head down to see that he was not offended; received his smile, his kiss upon her pretty, tumbled curls. Peace restored, Watson took up his paper.

Silence for five minutes.

"Challie?"

"Well?"

"I can talk to you about anything I like now we are married, can't I?"

"You could before—"

"I mean a little—er—"

"Fy!" said Hugh, laughing, "naughty Betty!"

"It's about Mr. Falls."

"Fire away! You don't know anything on Falls. Nobody does; he is n't that sort."

"Pooh!" said Betty, "pooh, several times! What do you call all that talk about Rosebud, Hugh?"

Watson was reading without his glasses, holding the paper close before his face, and his start was lost in the rustling folds. He answered carelessly after a second. "What?—what about Rosebud?"

"Oh, Hughie!" Betty's voice was like the cooing of a dove in mating season. "Of course you know! Why, it was all over town!"

"I do not know; I never heard a word about Falls

in connection with the girl in my life! I have lost sight of her utterly, and"—he paused a moment, looking carelessly along the columns of the paper—"and I wish you to do the same."

But Betty had disappeared; only a bunch of soft curls remained above the surface to show where she had gone down; a stifled sob came from the depths.

Watson cast the paper aside, and rising, passed into the next room. A pitiless search-light seemed to have been turned upon the innermost recesses of his soul—his mind. Under its light he saw the circumstances of the past weeks with startling clearness. This talk—how much it made clear to him! Falls had been under this for weeks. He leaned upon the window in the dressing-room, his hands clinched upon the sill. Before him was a stretch of dazzling sand, the feathery green of palmetto scrub and the blue waters seen through a burning mist.

This was why Falls lingered in New York; this was what had come between him and Joan.

"I know well," he thought, hot with impotent anger against himself, "those wicked tongues of slander, the sickening mesh of circumstance in which his manhood has struggled, netted and bound! Falls and Betty—always those two!"

A sob fell upon his ear. Poor Betty!

He went to her, drew the covering from her face, kissed her—soothed her with caresses. "You said I might," she sobbed, "and then—then—I did *not* make it up, Hugh! It was all over town!"

He kissed her again absently. "Betty, does Joan know this—vile thing you women have invented about Falls?"

"Why, Hugh! Everybody in 'Dairville knows it! It's

been talked about for months. Mr. Cad Allen saw Mr. Falls in New York with Rosebud — ”

Watson groaned.

“ — and Joan’s Aunt ’Liza went out to the mountain house and told her.”

“ My prophetic soul ! ” muttered Hugh.

He propped the girl up in her pillows, took her two hands in his own. “ Now listen, Betty, never forget this as long as you live, child ! You are my wife — the core of my soul — and all that a man can give a woman of himself I give you. But there is a big part of me — of any man — which men do not give to women ; all of me that is not yours belongs to Falls ! I love him as much as I do you — yes ! let me tell it you — make you understand this once for all ! I love Gregory differently, you know — differently, but as truly as I love you ! I could not see him suffer, know that I had wronged him — see another wrong him, any more than I could see you wronged ! Falls is my friend, you are my wife — both are dearer to me than life. Never, as long as you live, try to come between us ! Never again let a word of evil of him pass your lips ! This thing you speak of is a vile — a heinous falsehood ! Never let me hear it on your lips again. Now put your arms round my neck — tell me that you love me, and that you will obey me.”

Two soft arms came round his neck.

“ I love you, Challie,” whispered Betty meekly, “ and — and I — ”

“ Say it, Betty ! ”

“ — will obey you.”

XXIII

LOVE WILL FIND THE WAY

"**I**S Miss Adair at home, Milly Ann?" asked Hallett, standing upon the Adair door-mat the day after Joan's return from St. Augustine.

"Ya-as, sur," demurely answered Milly Ann. She led the way with soft teetering footsteps to the quiet room where Joan and Judge Adair sat playing their nightly game of cribbage.

Hallett called often at the house, but he never entered this room without a renewed sense of its charm, as well as a chastening recollection of the not long past days when Judge Adair's courtesy, like that of so many of Hallett's gentlemen acquaintances, had not extended to his fireside. Those were the days when Hallett, with the patience of the born diplomat, had founded his faith in the solvency of time to bring about the disintegration of those conditions which made him welcome in the offices and business houses of his men acquaintances, and barred their homes to him. His faith had not gone unrewarded. In the ten years of his residence in Alabama he had seen that slow stream of time reintegrate from the débris of the old régime a new system of things. Upon the silt thus deposited, and covering the wreckage of the war, had been laid the foundations of the New South. That he had himself been accepted, at last, simply as a compro-

mise, a part of the new system of things, Hallett perfectly understood, but the knowledge had brought neither resentment nor the slightest abatement of a policy which had been so potent a factor in the amelioration of those conditions. So it had come about that in the general subsidence Hallett had found himself among, if not of, the old aristocracy of Dixie — accepted by most of the old families of Adairville, welcomed by a few, rejected by two or three. Of this latter small class, whose attitude was marked by courteous indifference rather than antagonism, Judge Adair's family had been one. During the earlier days of Hallett's residence in the town, the family had consisted of only Judge Adair and Hugh, Joan being a madcap schoolgirl, whom the town alternately worshiped for her beauty and brilliancy, and groaned over for her reckless independence of thought and action. Even in those days, when she had passed him, swinging her books with the strong, easy swing of a lovely boy, with shy glances from under her gold-tipped lashes, Hallett had adored her.

Upon the reopening of the house to society, when Joan was grown, Hallett had persistently sought an entrance there, paying open and assiduous court to the girl. His wooing was of the deliberate, strategic order, the carefully perfected plan of the born intriguer. And she watched his siege in silence and with an amused tolerance, without evincing sufficient interest to erect a barricade or prepare a line of defense.

To-night she greeted him calmly upon his entrance, including him in the fireside group with a courteous ease that just missed cordiality. To his passionate, resentful eyes she seemed somehow to be denying him the right

even to look at her, as she leaned far back in her low chair among her cushions, her drooping lashes hiding dreaming eyes of cool abstraction, leaving the guest tacitly to her father. The talk ran nimbly on between the two men; it was all of Falls and Falls's affairs, and of the once more disabled plant of the ill-starred Power and Passenger Company. Joan heard from Hallett's lips for the first time of the fresh disaster which had completely wrecked the machinery.

Carelessness, Hallett pronounced it, or criminal ignorance. No,—this with rather more reserve,—he believed the town papers had not reported it. Probably in the course of the next month or two Montgomery would give them several columns of "language" about it.

All this, together with a cheerful prophecy concerning the total extinguishment of the Power and Passenger Company, was detailed in Hallett's clear-cut tones, with frank regret very pleasant to see. "Oh, yes," said he, in answer to Judge Adair's last question, "it closed down on last Tuesday night. No sign yet from Falls; yet Carmichael would no doubt have notified him. It has been rumored that Falls was on his way to England. At all events, only about five days remain to him of the two weeks' limit; unless he is heard from in that time it means smash for Falls!"

Joan, lying lazily in her long chair, brushing her cheek with a deep red rose from the vase beside her, in apparent abstraction, was making a rapid calculation. Last Tuesday, Hallett had said? Watson had not heard of this on Saturday, when she had left him in Florida! Her mind ran over the letter from Falls which Hugh had read her the day she left, dated from his club at New York;

she remembered the address perfectly, but — that could wait!

The words of the letter started up before her eyes, in Falls's clear, even writing:

"I will run the plant," he had written, "as long as I have a dime, or a lump of coal — or a man to shovel it!"

Seven days, and no word or sign that he knew or cared for the fate of his plant! Incomprehensible! When she caught the current of the talk once more, Hallett was saying:

"No; Carmichael is with him — though he was advised to get clear of him weeks ago — rats and a sinking ship, you know!"

"Is the Power and Passenger Company a sinking ship?" asked Judge Adair quietly.

Hallett caressed a knee of his faultless trousers with an air of regretful decision, as he said:

"I think it is, Judge! I — well, if any man in town is qualified to know the condition of Falls's affairs, I am, and I know positively that every dollar he has in the world is in this deal here. There is not a ha'penny of English capital invested in it. When it goes down" — a hard complacence crept unconsciously into Hallett's frank tones — "when it goes down, Falls goes under with it!"

In Judge Adair's eyes, resting courteously upon his guest, there shone so clear a light of comprehension, so scornful a summary of the whole recital, and withal so strong a likeness to the lovely, downcast one across the hearth, that Hallett's startled eyes sought Joan with a swift interpretation of her cold abstraction, only, however, to meet instant reassurance in her attitude and expression.

Joan reclined among her rose-colored pillows, her graceful head drooping in thought, while the roses bending from their tall vase beside her were not more still, nor seemingly more unattached than she.

But Hallett could not see her eyes. Nor could he know of the turmoil of rushing thoughts engrossing Joan's mind, as she sought to grasp, to fix in memory, the flood of facts poured out upon the stream of Hallett's clear, incisive speech. And all the while came the insistent cry of her heart — to help him! Her breath came short, in little sobbing breaths — the furbelows of her dainty gown trembled to the rapid beating of her heart.

Hallett talked on and on; she could not keep pace with it. Would he never stop — never give her time to think — to plan!

The necessity for action gnawed at her mind; but action in what direction?

Still she lay quietly among her pillows and seemed to droop in the heat like the heavy-headed roses beside her. Groping blindly for the end of the tangled skein, her gaze, focused to inward vision, fell upon Hallett's face as he mused, for the space of a heart-beat in a pause of the talk, upon the man whose ruin he had so ably and inexorably compassed. And in that instant the kaleidoscope of her broken thoughts was shaken into form by what she saw there; her brain cleared as does some turgid mixture under the action of a chemical reagent.

There had come to Hallett, sitting in the light of that shining hearth, under the eyes of the woman whom Falls loved, one of those crucial moments in which a mind trained to duplicity turns upon itself, and the features, so long obedient to the tyrant will, turn traitor to their

parts; it is an instant when the will is in abeyance, when there seems to be a blind spot in the nervous tissue of the brain corresponding to the blind spot upon the retina where there is no vision; will is for the instant suspended, and the thing upon the mind, which has brooded in secret, radiates from a man's glance — from his whole face.

Joan had, in an extraordinary degree, the intuitive intelligence which distinguishes women of high mentality; and supplementing this gift was her power of clear reasoning inherited from her father, as well as the old man's inimitable poise. It kept her silent now in her attitude of graceful ease, while a fierce tumult of thought assailed her.

In the instant when she had looked through his reverie into the brain behind it, the whole scheme by means of which Falls was to be frozen out and ruined was projected before Joan's mental vision with the clear detail of an image cast by a magic lantern.

A web of circumstance was spun backward in her brain and she saw the extinguishment of Falls's plans — the imminent ruin of his business life.

Joan rose after a few moments, and, crossing to her father, bent a cheek pale with excitement to his own. "Father dear, I must ask you and Mr. Hallett to excuse me to-night. I — I do not feel just myself," she said quietly; and it was so evident that she did not, that they made no demur. She left them, bidding Hallett finish her game of cribbage with her father.

In the hall, her heavy train tucked into the hollow of her arm, Joan went with flying feet to her father's study, where a minute's search supplied her with a telegraph form; she rapidly filled in the name and address

as she stood, and without hesitation the message flowed from her pen:

"Your affairs need you here; return at once," she wrote, and paused; the pen slid from her unconscious fingers, unheeded, to the floor; she sank upon the arm of the chair, staring at a square of wall-paper with eyes that saw nothing but Falls's face looking down upon her in anger and pain. A mist blurred her clear eyes, a choking anguish of shame rose in her throat as that last scene with Falls rose before her with aching distinctness.

The clock behind her on the mantel began to strike—ten, eleven! Joan started up, found her pen, and bending down, wrote firmly, "J. H. Adair," which were her father's initials as well as her own.

A wire also to Hugh—a dozen addresses recklessly dashed down; some one of them must find him! Ten minutes later Joan stood arrayed in her box coat, with Milly Ann beside her.

Milly Ann was Joan's usual escort in her after-dinner visitings among her girl friends on the hill, and the two girls found their way with accustomed feet down the back stairs, out on the rose gallery to where, in the very blackness of darkness, the terraced lawns yawned below them, leading to the road to town.

XXIV

A WOMAN'S VERDICT

THE hall clock pointed, with grave reproof, to a quarter past twelve as Joan softly crossed the hall on her way up-stairs. She held her breath as she passed the parlor door, turning away after a moment's pause with an impatient gesture. They were still playing cribbage. Would Mr. Hallett never go! Clad in her long gown of silk, as blue as the October skies, Joan restlessly paced the floor, with her door set open to hear Hallett when he took his departure.

To and fro she went, and the soft whisper of the silk followed her. She loosened the heavy plaits of her bright hair, pushing it restlessly from her face, gathering the long, curling ends into her hands as she wandered about the room, drawing it like a mantle of cloth of gold about her, seeing always Falls's face before her; his look of pain, of scorn, of unfaltering renunciation. She had not stated the proposition fairly to her father, he had said. If that be true, she could undo that, at least; make reparation in that far for the wrong she had done him. Wrong! She knew it now. That hideous memory, which had spread through her like a slow poison, tainting her mind, filling her soul with sick horror, fell from her to-night like an infected garment. During the weeks she had been with Hugh in Florida, his faith in Falls,

his devotion, his loyalty had appealed to her strongly, set, as it were, against her own faltering unfaith. Over and over she had thought that Hugh would speak — would intercede for his friend, but he had not. Only a moment at the last he had spoken briefly. He went with her to the train, and stole her a moment from the gay party of friends — from Caldwell and his tender, unobtrusive solicitude — and whispered just as the train was pulling out: "Joan, Falls is going to England next month, but he 'll be home before he sails." That was all.

This scheme of fraud and treachery of which she had learned to-night — and of which Hugh evidently knew nothing — had been skilfully planned and carried out just when both Watson and Falls were out of town, by Hallett and a ring of home men — her father's and her own friends and kinsfolks.

True, she had no proof. And her father would be sure to talk about proof. Both he and Hugh always talked of proof, when a thing was as pl-a-in as d-a-y!

But Hallett was going at last. Judge Adair's tone, courteous and a little weary, reached Joan as he bade his guest good night. Joan found her way swiftly to the study, where she knew she would find her father smoking his nightcap pipe, and Pomp nodding upon the rug at his feet.

He heard her coming, soft-footed like a kitten, over the shining hall floor. "Is the headache better — or was it Hallett?"

"It was Mr. Hallett," she answered, in a tense voice that startled her father. "Father dear, I want to talk to you, if you are not too sleepy. No, no — I am too heavy for your knee. Let me have a piece of your chair

— so. I am a great, big girl now, you know, father; ‘expanding into womanhood,’ as you said. . . . Do you remember when you told me that I would know that I was grown up — when my heart began to ache?”

The Judge laid his pipe aside, waiting gravely, his hand upon the heavy, unbound locks which made her seem a child again — except for that pale excitement on her face, so new, so strange in his boyish Joan. When at last he caught the drift of her hurried speech, Joan was telling him in terse, clear narrative of the plot against Falls. Every detail of the treachery, the injustice, seeming to be etched into her brain; even names and dates were fitted into her account with an unconscious accuracy that amazed Judge Adair. As she went on, her father, more and more troubled, took her cold hands into his and felt them tremble; noted the pale exhaustion of her face with pained wonder, which was not wonder either, but premonition of the thing that had haunted him for years. This was love! For thirty years his heart-strings had been wrapped round his two women, this child and her mother. He saw on the face before him the pain, the rapture, which that other face had worn for him. This was love!

“ My daughter,” he said at length, “ I have known of this dirty piece of scheming for weeks — Hugh also; it has been patent to the town. Not, perhaps, just how it would be done, but that it would be done sooner or later. The tool was all that has been lacking until now; and now, it seems, Jimmy Carmichael was not able to stand the pressure. . . . But what is all this to you, my child — this vulgar wrangle between two conflicting business interests? ”

He felt her hands grow colder and the slender fingers

closed upon his own with nervous tension, but she met his eyes bravely.

"I thought you would ask that, father. I—I am ready to answer, but—you know, don't you, father?"

"I have an idea, daughter, of course. The signs are not hard to read on a face like yours. Will you answer me—I must know, my pet, if I am to help—I am to help, am I not?"

Her arms about his neck answered him, her cheek on his.

"Is Falls your lover, child?" with calm directness.

"I—I do not know, father," she murmured, her face hidden.

"Joan!" remonstrated the old man, "what can I make of that? You must know, my pet. Women always know—"

"I do not know *now*."

"Ah! Does Falls love you, or not?"

"Not now," more faintly still.

"He did, and he told you so, and now he does not? Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Is this a lovers' quarrel, dear?"

"No, oh, no, father!"

The old man mused, his daughter held close at his heart. "I cannot probe your heart with questions, daughter. Tell me, if you will, how it is with you."

"I loved him—I love him now; but I wronged him—cruelly, father. And—and I have lost him."

The old man drew her closer to his heart.

"What could you have done to Falls to wrong him so bitterly, daughter?"

"I told him that you said no sane man would doubt the evidence of his senses — "

Judge Adair started, held the girl off from him while he interrogated her with grave eyes.

"My child! What can this mean, Joan?"

She gazed back at him with wide eyes, whose strained gaze was dark with trouble, as she answered as simply as a child:

"I do not know, though I thought I did. Will you tell me, please, father? He — Gregory said I had not stated the proposition fairly to you — "

"State it now. Be careful, daughter. Language is a terrible weapon to slay happiness. I 've seen it twine like a cobra about a man and choke life, honor, happiness out of him!"

"Once before, some time ago, I asked you about the direct evidence of one's own senses. Do you remember?"

"I think I do; you often ask me abstract questions, but — yes, I think I can recall it. You said, if I remember, that if a person saw a thing with his own eyes, under circumstances which admitted of no reasonable doubt, how would the man stand toward the fact?"

"And you said, father, that no sane man would doubt the evidence of his senses; and I told him — told Gregory — and — and — "

"It was Falls you asked me about? You had seen him — "

"I saw him with — "

"Another woman?"

"Yes."

Judge Adair rose, putting Joan gently on one side, and paced the room with thoughtful steps.

"Child," he said, coming back to her, laying his hand gently upon her bowed head, "child, one isolated fact, even if it rests upon the evidence of a man's senses, may be susceptible of explanation — extenuation."

"It was not an isolated fact, father. I thought of that; I fought for my faith against all sorts of odds. There was corroborative evidence — it all hung together, too, too fatally well!"

"But you say you wronged him — wronged Falls? You believe him to be innocent —"

"I *feel* him innocent, in my heart, you know, father. I do not think him so with my brain. When I shut my eyes, my mental eyes only feel, only — only love him. Then nothing matters. But I cannot stay asleep. You see, father, I am not as strong as he is. I cannot put him out of my heart — cease to think of him, to love him! No matter what I know, I must love him just the same!"

Judge Adair stooped, gathering the girl up in his arms, crooning over her as her mother might have done.

"I 've let you suffer like this! Taught you to blot out life with question-marks! God forgive me! . . . Who was this woman, Joan — did you know her?"

She writhed in his arms, pressing her face into his breast. "Do not ask me, father — I cannot, cannot tell you — I should die of shame!" she moaned.

The old man's face hardened.

"Joan," he said at last, "if I believed this thing, I should not advise you to put Falls forever from your mind and heart; I should command it. I should take you to the world's end to keep you from him. But something tells me, child, — I *feel*, as you say, that this cannot be. There is something in the man himself which

forbids me to think him vile. Falls is not an easy man to know, 't is true; he is a stiff, cold fellow— How he ever won my baby's heart! But the very fact that he has, no matter through what storm and stress, ranges me on his side. You could not love him, child, were he unworthy. . . . Let me plead for Falls—for my daughter's heart. Joan, I have been a judge for forty years. I was weighing human evidence before Falls was born, and I know how little it is worth. Let me look into this matter—"

"Oh, father! You are the dearest—but, father, you have forgotten that he hates me now!"

"Pooh! Falls is eating his heart out in New York to-night for your sake, child. Unless, indeed"—he stopped, laughed gently—"unless he has your telegram by this time, and is worrying over his plant. Poor Falls—poor Orestes! Scourged by the furies—his love and his business! He's made a magnificent fight here, and against the heaviest odds! And now this! You do not know, Joan, what a thing like this can be to a man. A proud, reserved man, like Falls—"

"Father, do not, do not! I cannot, cannot bear it—"

He soothed her for the moment, but he did not spare her. Gently, but inexorably, he did the duty that his wife would have done more tenderly, perhaps; but he did it in the only way he knew, the way that nearly seventy years of life had taught him.

"Love is not divisible into its elements," he told her. "We cannot analyze it, accepting and rejecting as we will; it is not a mental thing, as you would make it, Joan, and you must see this. You have told me that you love Falls, but that you must close the doors of your mind to do

so; that is not love, my precious. Life will teach you. Falls gave you your first lesson, when he left you, in perfect love—the sort Falls is demanding of you; and that very fact makes me trust him. Mind and heart, brain and conscience, body and soul, the depths of your nature no less than its heights, all must pull together. Love fills the whole perspective of life. ‘The taint of earth, the odor of the skies,’ is in it, child.”

He paused, gazing into the fire, looking back over the wide area of his past; then solemnly he went on: “I would not myself have a woman—not if she gave me her life, her heart, her lips, and all wifely submission—if she held back even a shred of her faith in me.”

“He said so, father; he told me that it must be ‘all in all, or not at all!’”

“Ah! Well—I can go a little further than you seem willing to go, though Falls is your lover. I will say, I *think*—I am of the deliberate opinion—that Falls can explain this circumstance. . . . I will find out. How? Easily enough. Nothing is ever really hidden in this world.”

They talked on before the sinking fire, and the girl found comfort; the terrible finality of youth’s vision became expanded to her father’s own, and she saw, not the universe in black ruins about her head, but the sunlight upon the distant hills.

“Falls has not a leg to stand on in this business here,” he told her calmly; “but it does not matter. The Power Company must shut down—is shut down now—and that does not matter either. No business on earth could stand the drain Falls has been under for ten months. Had he the Bank of England at his back. . . . ‘Break his heart?’

Is this my child I have boasted could reason? Men do not put their hearts into their business. Falls knew what to do with his heart. His bank account only is in danger. If he had invested his capital as safely as he has his heart! . . . But do not worry about your lover, child. Father will see. Evert and Jim Frazier do not hold 'Dairville in the hollow of their palms yet—not yet! Nor the State Judiciary, either. Hugh will be back—you sent him a wire also? Right! We will have that opinion from the Supreme Court in April; and then Hugh will have a word to say to Evert, and to Hallett—and maybe to Sears. You knew that Falls has found McCormack? Orestes may find the scourge in his own hand some fine day. But it all hinges upon this decision—and it upon Caldwell!"

"Did you know Mark Caldwell had been in St. Augustine, father? Well, he was. And I talked to him quite a good deal about this matter here. . . . Why, I talk about what I like, of course! It seemed such a pity, you know, that he should not know, before he made his decision, *just* how things were; and so—why, I told him! He was not a judge then, father, was he? Was n't he just a plain man? At a dance, you know—sailing—driving. He had not his judicial mind on then, had he?"

The old Judge laughed, hugged her close: "God knows!" he cried, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. "Only God, who made feminine logic and put it in the world to work confusion in men's minds, could answer that! Thank Heaven it is not within my jurisdiction! Now kiss me, and run away to bed."

"Fadie,"—she had not called him thus for years,— "fadie," Joan paused, pressed down the ashes in her

father's pipe with a deft little middle finger, ramming them hard home, "you 're sure you are not jealous about — about anything? You don't mind my loving — any one else?"

"No, I would not keep you from your lover, child." And the old man held her close that she might not see the quiver of his face.

XXV

“MY LOVE IN DIXIE”

A N April sky hung above the terraced lawns; the spring wind stirred gently the half-unfolded, satiny foliage of trees, whose wide canopies cast a dappled shade upon the new grass and the tender verdure of the under-growth. In the dark wall of the cedars a redbird flashed in and out, swaying upon the somber bough like a live coal, as he tuned his golden flute to the ear of his little dun mate, watching, with bright eyes, her gorgeous lord preening and parading without. From the silver poplars, shaking a cloud of silken catkins like a sunset cloud of ashes of roses, came the wrangling of the blue jays.

Joan watched them with a smile, standing upon one of the upper terraces, whence she issued calm orders from the depths of a white sunbonnet tied under her dainty chin to old Jeff and the Captain of the Guard, 'Zekial.

“I want e-v-ery sin-gle leaf raked off of these terraces and carried off and burned — in an unquenchable fire! without any smoke, Jeff and Zeke — without a p-a-rticle of smoke!”

“Ya-as 'm,” said Jeff to Joan; and he muttered to his wheelbarrow: “Gawd A'might' knows how I'se gine to burn up des 'ere wet leaves in er unsquinchable fire — dout makin' no smoke! Git 'p, wheelbar'r!”

Joan turned to go within, and found herself in a pair of arms—strong arms, tweed clad—that gave her a hearty embrace; a pair of glasses fell upon the ground at her feet, and Watson, finding her mouth at last under the crisp flutings of her head-gear, kissed her heartily.

"That's one of the many advantages of being a married man—I can kiss you again, Jo!"

Joan found his glasses and put them on for him, his eyes resting lovingly upon her the while.

"How well and handsome you look, Hugh! I used not to think you handsome. And what p-e-rfectly l-o-v-e-ly clothes!"

"They are part of my trousseau," he said complacently; and Joan gave a dainty shriek of laughter.

"Hugh, do men have a trousseau? Why, I thought only girls—"

"Goose! Did you suppose a man rushes into matrimony as he would from a burning building, with only what he had on?"

"Something like it!" she laughed. "Come in, Hugh, and stop for luncheon."

"No," he said, suddenly grave, "I came out to see you, Joan—to have a talk like old times. Let's go on to the wistaria arbor; that's a good place to exchange confidences!" with an attempt at lightness.

A fear clutched Joan's heart. Had he sailed, and had Challie come to tell her?

Watson threw himself down upon the bench.

"I courted Betty here," he said, looking about him. "There, right there by the steps, I kissed her for the first time. The more fit for expiation!"

Joan turned her clear eyes upon him in amaze.

"Expiation, Hugh? Why, what can you mean? And to me?"

"Aye; to you! But for another—for Falls." He broke off abruptly, sat in thought, as though he sought within his mind a fitting opening for what he had to say; but when he spoke again it was to recall with tender gravity scenes of their childhood, when Joan was but a baby.

"You don't remember when Elvira used to bring you down in your little nightie to say good night to me and Uncle John, do you, Jo?" He laughed boyishly at a sudden recollection. "You used to ride straddle on my knee—and stick out your little pink toes, and say, 'T-u turkey,' after me. You were the sweetest angel that ever dropped through a star-hole! Have you forgotten 'T-u turkey'?"

"Yes, Challie," she told him gently; "that classic ode has escaped me. It is part of the expiation?"

"Aye; it goes back to that time. But you must be nearly twenty now, Joan, are you not? You are a woman now; old enough to understand—"

Joan turned a face of anguish upon him, her hands fluttering to her heart.

"Oh, Hugh," she cried, "must you? Oh, must you?" and buried her face upon his bosom.

Watson put his hand upon her head, pressing it closer to him. "Keep it there, Joan," he said hoarsely; "I—I can tell this cursed thing easier if I do not see your eyes! . . . Last winter," he went on, forcing himself to speak firmly and rapidly, "last winter, Joan, you saw—out there on the mountainside, at a cabin—you saw Falls there with a colored girl—Rosebud, did you not? Joan, listen to me. You were wrong—cruelly, wickedly wrong!"

Falls had never seen that girl but once in his life before that afternoon. He was acting for—for another man—for me, Joan! That girl, Rosebud,”—he spoke slowly, as though to gain breath to steady his hoarse voice, which was scarce audible; his handsome, stolid face was white to the lips,—“that girl is—my daughter, Joan.”

With a bitter cry the girl tore herself from his arms. “Oh, Challie, Challie! You, too! I’ve lost you, too!”

Watson sat in silence, his heavy face hiding his pain. It was the bitterest moment of his life. “All that Mrs. Allen told you was as false as hell—false, not in intention, but in fact,” he said at last. “Falls was with Rosebud in New York for about two hours. He met her there, put her aboard a steamer, paid her passage to Germany—with my money! He did this for me—to lift off of me the consequences of my own viciousness. And to save Betty. It was simple friendship to me; no other motive on God’s earth! And for that he has been hounded by their blatant tongues!”

Joan leaned back in the corner of the bench, her eyes upon the long line of the mountains in front of her, her soft hands clasped tight together. Watson parted them, and taking one into his warm clasp went on:

“Hallett had got hold of this—this old madness of mine. He had a letter—absolute proof—and he was using it to injure me, to ruin Falls, and to break Betty’s heart. Falls went to him and took the letter—took it by force, you know. Now, Joan, you understand, do you not, that you hold my happiness and Betty’s—Betty’s very life, child!—in this little rosy hand?” He put it to his lips. “I laid my happiness cheerfully in the balance against Falls’s honor; but Betty, Joan—”

“I know, Challie; I understand.”

‘And Falls? Joan, has all this nightmare that I have gone through here to-day — this pain to you — has all this been in vain? Things will be right between you now?’

“He hates me!” she murmured; “he will never, never forgive me, Hugh. Never!”

“Falls loves you to distraction, Joan; he will love you as long as he lives, even if he does not come back to you.”

Joan turned her startled eyes upon Watson, with an agonized question that her breathless lips could not utter.

“No; not that! Falls will be in Adaирville to-night. I meant come back in the sense of making the first advance toward patching up this — this quarrel. That is all; but, Joan, there is a harsh, unbending streak in Falls, for all his gentle tolerance, and he ’ll take it through life with him — and six feet into the ground at last! Don’t cross it, dear girl. And don’t expect of him what is not in him to give.”

“Challie, what can I do to — ”

“To show Falls that you are changed, that you will make him happy? Nothing, unless he comes to you; or unless chance accident throws him in your way. May fate send the hour!”

“But I thought,” she said timidly, “I feared — he was going back to England.”

Hugh’s brow clouded. “He is,” he said; “almost at once. He will be here only for one week; he sails the twenty-fifth — on the *Waldravia*. . . .

Falls arrived at midnight, his train rolling into a station dark as Erebus.

He alighted amid a crowd of growling, swearing passengers — traveling men, for the most part — listening with grim amusement as they cursed the town's administration with fluency and abandon, while they stumbled down the steps and about the unlighted station. A lantern here and there in the hand of a train-man, the lamps of the waiting cabs and carriages, the sickly gleam of coal oil from the ticket offices and waiting-rooms, alone mitigated the universal gloom.

"Cab, sur — dat yu', Mis'r Falls? Lem'me tek yer up. Power-house? She 's shet down, sur — ya-as, sur — nigh on to two weeks, sur. What, sur? We ain't dun had no lights, er no kind. . . . Mr. Watson's 'partment? Ya-as, sur, I knows, sur, — Leftwich Building. Thanky, sur!"

In the familiar rooms, which were cosy and clean, with a bare, manlike cleanliness — Falls had inherited the Honorable Peter since Hugh's marriage — he flung himself moodily into a chair, and clasping his hands behind his head stared absently in front of him with eyes which saw close ahead the wreck of his business prospects. The fierce passion of anger and revenge which had torn him when his machinery had been wrecked that first time had given place to a dull quiet. The game was about played out, and his stake swept off the table. There remained to him but to rise and go his way; to cut off with one clean blow the encumbering wreck of his ten months in Dixie; to kill memory with work; to sanely and bravely grasp life at another point, and to bury this dead year deep out of sight. . . .

A trembling little form had crept upon his knee, a wriggling little body clambered over his bosom, Bobby's

warm tongue kissed his cheek. Falls's blank eyes, coming slowly back to life, became conscious that they rested upon Joan's face in its medallion frame on the mantel, and she seemed to smile upon him, tender, debonair, clad in the lovely ball-gown which she had worn that eventful night. Falls rose and leaned over it, studying it with bitter eyes.

He turned from it with a harsh laugh. "All of a picce," he muttered, "all of a piece! Dixie and Dixie's daughter!"

As he turned away, a rapid, stumbling step upon the stair caught his ear; he sprang to the door.

"Hugh!"

"Falls, old fellow!"

A strong hand-clasp, a moment's silent gaze eye to eye, then a joyous chuckle from Watson, as he fumbled in his pocket and handed a scrap of yellow paper to Falls.

"We've won out! The opinion has been handed down, and the Tenth Circuit is a last year's bird's nest. Tony is a naked, wandering, melancholy ghost of a back number. Moral —"

"Let Cruikshanks go. He's past." Falls flung the scrap of paper on the table. "That draws the Cumberland Gas Company's last trump. Now with the London and Edinboro' Consolidated Companies, Limited, as a lever, why should we not take a turn at the screw ourselves, Hugh?"

"Aye!" cried Hugh exultingly. "Why not indeed! You have McCormack? Then we'll stick our 'local capitalists' for punitive damages in the Federal courts. 'Sting money' will make Evert and Hallett sweat worse than the old General did under that B. H. & Q. business."

"You know," said Falls steadily, his firm hand on Bobby's silvery coat, stroking it softly,—“you know, Watson, that my own stake has gone down with the Power and Passenger Company. I will turn it over to the London and Edinboro', but, owning both, it seems to me they can dictate terms to the honorable city of ‘Dairville’!”

There was a bitter ring in Falls's voice new to Hugh, and he turned to him with anxious, covert scrutiny as he replied:

“Judge Adair told me six weeks ago that this would be the result of this entanglement; he does not advise litigation; but I do. I would give ten years of my life to squeeze that ring! We'll do it, Greg! You will make more money this way, Falls,” he went on, “and have a better time, managing here for the London and Edinboro’—”

“Yes?” absently. “I'm not so keen about money as I was. If Bobby can have his chop and a nigger to give him his bath, we'll pull through.” He shook the little dog lovingly. “We are not such high-rollers as we were, are we, Bobby? And we'll not manage for the London and Edinboro’—shall we, Bob-White? We'll see the world together; Dixie has passed—for us!” His voice shook on the last words. He rose and wandered restlessly about the rooms. Watson noted that his old, keen vigor seemed dimmed, the fold in his brow deeper; he paused before the mantelpiece again, and Watson rose and stood beside him with an arm about his shoulder; together and silently they looked upon Joan's pictured face, still smiling upon them from the medallion.

“Greg,” said Hugh, at last, “Greg, kick me if you like—but I've got to talk!”

"Talk on, old man — why not?" Falls stooped as he spoke and blew a speck of dust off the frame, and set it straight with a gentle touch of his firm hand.

"Joan knows now, Falls, of her mistake. She knows all — quite all! And she has suffered — God, how she has suffered! Were Joan a man, Falls, she would follow you to the world's end to expiate with blood or service the wrong she did you — just as you or I would do."

He ceased, waiting for Falls to speak; but the silence remained unbroken; there was a hard look in Falls's eyes.

Hugh turned to take his hat and paused.

"Greg," he burst out restlessly, "I hate to have you here alone. These rooms seem dreary after home. Come back with me, won't you? Your room is ready — Betty told me to bring you back; she's looking for you."

"I will come with pleasure, Hugh, for a day before I leave. Tell Mrs. Watson so, and thank her for me. But these rooms are not dreary to me."

The week of Falls's stay slipped by like a fevered dream to Joan. The long, bright April days seemed to be shod with lead — yet winged with the speed of light, as she clung to each hour that passed without a word, a message, from him. Too restless to endure the silent house, she spent the days of sunlight and perfume — filled to the brim with palpitating life and riotous bloom — in the gardens, with her sunbonnet tied under her chin and her trowel in her hand, making piteous pretense at work; her eyes straying now and then to the rocky road leading up from town. He would come that way — if he came!

Joan knew from Watson that Falls was not at the

power-house, that he was at Watson's offices, and she looked for him always in that direction; she would see him far down the street — when he came. And at night, when the kindly darkness hid that torturing road, she sat in the wistaria arbor, or paced the terraces with restless feet, back and forth — back and forth, listening, now that she could not see, for his step upon the stair; she had decided that he would come that way, by the rose garden and the broken flight of marble stairs — if he came.

But the days succeeded one another in pitiless indifference to her pain, and he did not come. The nights reeled round her, filled with the cloying sweetness of jasmine, full of restless memories — of unutterable longing!

Wednesday came and passed; Wednesday night — Thursday morning; the days were being paid out with cruel speed. Thursday afternoon (Falls was to leave at dawn on Friday for New York, sailing Saturday at noon) Betty came in, and found Joan among her roses, bare-headed, but gowned in filmy white — elaborately gowned, as Betty's shrewd eyes saw at once — with cunning touches and studied details. Betty wondered.

"Are you going to Mrs. Westingham's, after all? How p-e-rfectly — "

"I am not going," Joan hastened to say. "I — it is so hot — I hate playing cards days like this."

"Why are you so b-c-a-utifully gotten up to wander about here in the back yard?"

"I — I usually dress for dinner, Betty — "

"You take dinner about seven this time of year, and it's only half-past three. You got ready good and early, Jo. Well, I 'm going, and I 'm glad to have the chance, too! Hugh" — plaintively — "Hugh thinks it is silly

to play euchre. So I thought, as Challie is not here to-day — Hugh? Why, I thought you knew! Hugh went to New York with Mr. Falls this morning at daylight. The *Waldravia* sails Saturday. Silly in Hugh. He is perfectly d-aft about that Gregory Falls!"

"*Joan*," said Judge Adair that night at dinner, "do you remember Jim Davidson, who so inconsiderately left me that land in California? I 've been losing money right along on that ranch. What use in the world Jim thought I had for a ranch — Well, I 've decided to go out there — if you care to go, and if you can be ready to leave by the first of the week —"

"I 'm ready now," said Joan, still in the dream from which she could not rouse herself: a tossing space of rough, gray water, a big liner ploughing her way on and on, and a tall figure, a man with his face turned away from the land — she could see his eyes steady and cold — looking ahead to the life she was not to share!

"Monday will do," said the old man gently; "you might muss that pretty gown if we went to-night."

The girl threw herself eagerly into her preparations, ran gaily to and fro, talked brightly to her father of their plans, drilled Milly Ann, who was to go, in her duties as a traveling maid, and the two days sped by. But even Sunday brought no rest to Joan's active feet. Her gay tongue did not lag once all the day, a bright spot of color showed on her soft cheeks, her lips had the polished tinge of a tulip leaf — only her eyes were absent. That rough water and the big liner was a speck now, the tall figure lost — only his eyes still haunted her, looking steadily into her own with reproachful pain.

"Is it your night to look after the door, or Zeke's, Milly Ann?"

"It's ma night, Miss Jone, but Zeke he 'lowed —"

"Zeke, I am going to the wistaria arbor, and no matter who comes, no matter who, Zeke, I am not at home!"

"Ya'as 'm, Miss Jone," said Zeke, and retired to the back gallery steps and the soft picking of banjo strings, and Milly Ann's demure black charms.

The silken, gray-green foliage drew a rustling curtain about Joan, as she sat in the corner of the old bench with dreaming eyes. Hot tears gathered and quivering sobs rose in her throat as, one by one, memory gave back to her hungry heart his face, his voice, his touch.

Phase by phase the scene of their parting came back to her with torturing vividness. "All—all!" he had said. She had been so near to him—and now!

With the long vision of youth's clear eyes, Joan saw the years hurrying to meet her, to claim her, to cut her off from him. "Get this thing down—blot you out of my life as men do," he had said; and why not? With that clear balance which was part of her mental self, she saw herself walking serenely on to meet the insistent years, another form beside Falls; a woman's figure at his side—not her own. The girl sprang up in impotent anguish. Her soul, beating upward to where she had been taught to seek for comfort, asked the old question, old as love:

"Oh, God who put this love into my heart, why do I suffer so!"

A man's step fell upon the broken marble stairs—a rapid, ringing step that came straight on toward her hiding-place; a tall form swung into a bar of moonlight

upon the terrace, and Joan's heart leaped to her parted lips, as, with eyes which could not believe their own joy, she hung upon the familiar outlines — waiting. How deep those shadows were! It could not be Gregory, of course — he had sailed!

The man stepped into the second bar of moonlight lying like a sheeted ghost upon the terrace, and, with a broken cry the girl sprang up, sped with flying feet across the dewy grass, through the honeysuckle walk, past the pale cascades of jasmine into the starry ranks of moonlit lilies, and stopped, conscious as Eve, but with hands that fluttered toward him and lips that breathed his name.

Falls found her thus, a Burne-Jones angel among the lilies — the night wind holding the boughs aside to show him her face.

"Is it you?" she whispered, unable still to believe her joy, though her hands were held against his lips. "Did — did not the *Waldravia* sail?"

"I suppose so," said Falls, with his old, grave simplicity, though his voice was unsteady, "but when it came to the final turn of the screw, I found I could not leave you, Joan. Could not, of my own will, go where my duty and my manhood call me; and I came back to you, to my love in Dixie, to ask her to send me if she will —"

"To me? Have you come back to me?" She swayed toward him in the gloom, and Falls drew her close.

"Is it England?" he whispered, his cheek on hers, "together?"

"Yes — together."

"Have you thought," he said at last, "all that it means, love, to give up home, and kin, and friends — even your father?"

"Father?" she faltered.

"Yes," he told her steadily, "your father, too."

The girl paused upon her answer, and Falls strained her to him in an agony of suspense; the very currents of his blood seemed to stop, to wait upon her words.

She stirred in his embrace, lifted her face to his, met his eyes through the gloom steadily with her own.

"I have thought now, Gregory," she whispered, in a happy, breathless voice.

"Is it—"

"You!"

THE END.

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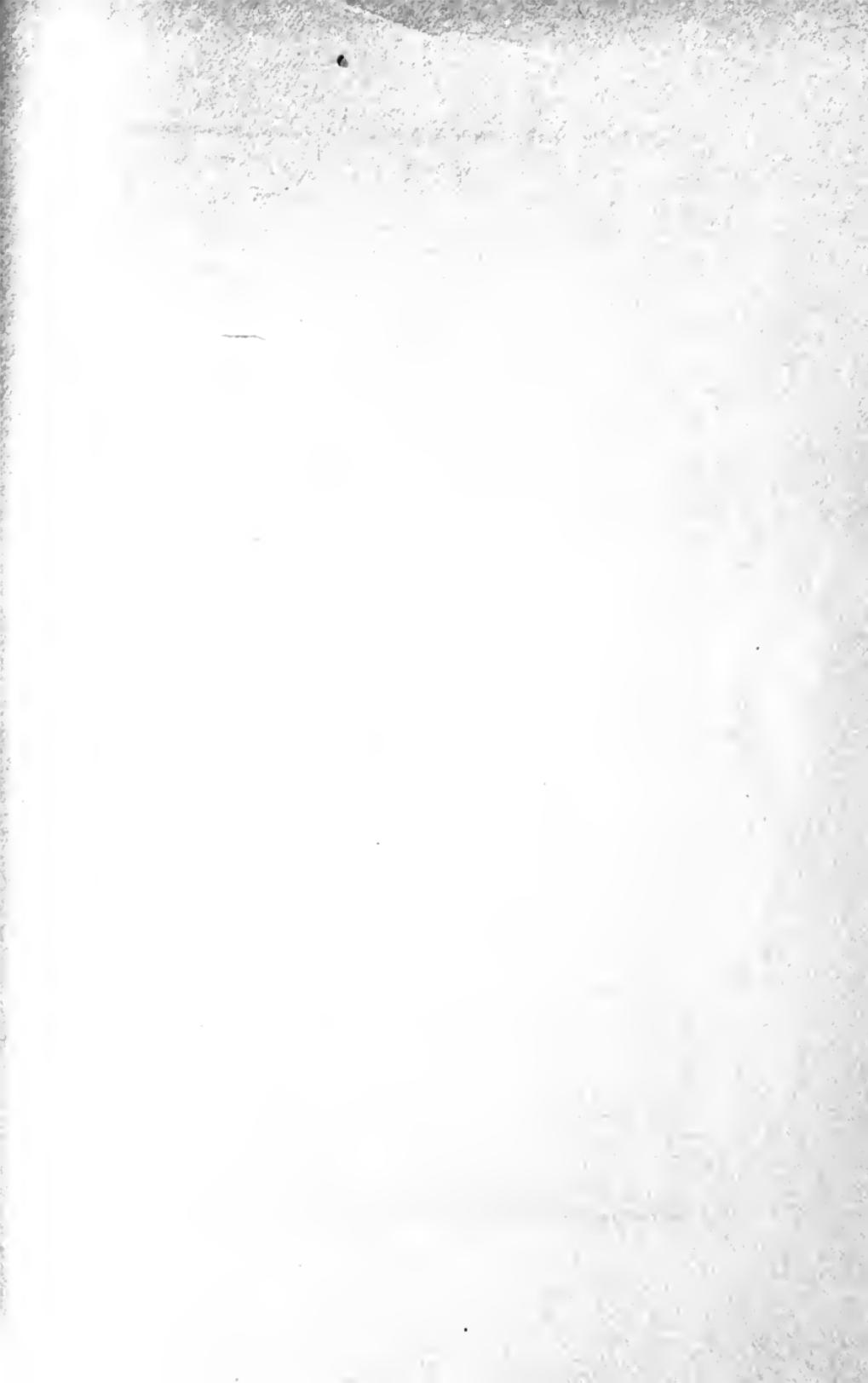
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